

Rural Kansas Superintendents' Priorities: Perceptions About
What Pre-Service Superintendents *Expected to Do* and
What They *Actually Do*.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe how rural superintendents identify their priorities before accepting their first superintendency compared to how they actually prioritize these responsibilities once becoming a superintendent. I asked rural superintendents to rate the relative importance (*i.e., Not important, Important, or Essential*) of five major areas: 1) selection, socialization, and monitoring of teachers/principals; 2) supervision and evaluation; 3) board/superintendent relationships; 4) goals and resource allocation; and 5) understanding the community.

Superintendents reported changes in their understanding and prioritization of responsibilities once in that role compared to their preconceived ideas of the priorities. Selecting, socialization, and retention of teachers/principals were essential priorities, while developing leadership capacity in teachers/principals from a global perspective based on a strategic plan incorporating stakeholder perspectives was also essential for their rural districts. Board of education/superintendent relationships were essential to building mutual trust and develop interpersonal communication. Lastly, actively participating in their local rural community was critical for rural superintendents in order to maintain the trust of the community.

In other words, superintendents serving in rural communities and the ideal positions that they loved individually assume multiple roles and responsibilities leading their school districts compared to superintendents in larger districts who have multiple subordinates where distributed leadership and delegation of responsibilities are more common.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The rural K-12 school district superintendency is one of the most rewarding and yet challenging positions of school administration. In Kansas, there are approximately 200 rural school districts with approximately the same number of superintendents. This study will describe how the lived experiences of rural Kansas superintendents identify their priorities before accepting their first superintendency compared to how they actually prioritize responsibilities once becoming a superintendent.

Rural school districts have been the backbone of education in the United States since the mid-1700's, when there were about 212,000 one-room schools in which half of all American school children were enrolled (Canales, Tejeda-Delgado, & Slate, 2008). The United States Census Bureau defines *rural* as any community population that has less than 2500 people and has less than 1000 people per square mile. Kansas is mostly a rural state with 221 school districts identified as rural (NCES, 2012). Utilizing the NCES definition of *rural* schools, approximately 58 percent of the school districts in the country are rural (NCES, 2012), where these districts educate nearly one-quarter of all the children in the United States (NCES, 2011).

In many urban school districts, the superintendent is often associated with major policy announcements and is rarely seen on a daily basis by the people within the district (Jenkins, 2007). Wylie and Clark found (as cited in Canales et al., 2008) that rural school systems are usually smaller and lack the number of positions of larger systems, where a single administrator is often assigned to coordinate multiple responsibilities which normally would be assigned to another position in the larger school district. Given the breadth of responsibilities, superintendents in rural school districts frequently are subject to uncertainty in their roles,

wherein they are uncertain about what their role should be, which when coupled with an unwieldy range of role expectations, may lead to low job satisfaction and high tension (Katz and Kahn as cited in Canales et al., 2008)

Further, rural school districts typically have not captured the imagination and curiosity of our nation (Arnold, 2000). This may be the reason there is so little scholarly research about rural public school districts in general, and particularly, on rural school district leadership (M. Arnold, 2004). Lamkin (2006) agrees that the challenge of educating students in rural school districts and schools has not received the attention it deserves.

Multiple studies concerning leadership practices among superintendents, specifically the type of practice that leads to academic reform, have been collected, analyzed, and reported based on studying leadership in urban and suburban districts (M. Arnold, 2004; M. L. Arnold, Newman, Gaddy, & Dean, 2005). On the contrary, the leadership practices of rural superintendents have generated little academic interest (Arnold, 2000; DeYoung, 1987).

Lamkin (2006) suggests this may be the case based on conventional wisdom that suggests the task of rural school district leadership is a lesser or secondary challenge when compared with that of urban and suburban school district leadership. The lack of academic research on rural schools and rural school leadership would seem to support this view (M. L. Arnold et al., 2005; Lamkin, 2006). There is also a shortage of current information about unique professional development opportunities available for rural administrators (M. Arnold, 2004). With this lack of research, there exists a significant gap in the knowledge base regarding the work and practice of effective rural superintendents (M. L. Arnold et al., 2005).

Superintendent leadership practices require that they “have the vision, skills and knowledge to lead in a new and complex world” (Hoyle, Bjork, Lars, Collier and Glass, 2005, p. 1). McFarlane (2010), utilizing Kouzes’s and Posner’s variables of leadership effectiveness; *challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way, and encouraging the heart* (Kouzes & Posner, 2003), describe the level of leadership effectiveness based upon perceptions of principals and stakeholders.

With this study, the terms *prioritize* or *priority* are used as a proxy for the level of importance, where it is expected that a superintendent will spend more time on *Essential* tasks than on *Important* or *Not Important* tasks. Therefore, rather than focusing on the priorities of individual tasks or responsibilities, my inquiry asked them to generalize the idea of priorities as being *Not Important* (low priority), *Important* (medium priority), or *Essential* (high priority).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of superintendents in Kansas’ rural school districts and address each of the following research questions:

- (1) In an ideal situation, looking back to when they were first hired as a superintendent, how do superintendents describe the priority of their responsibilities upon accepting their first superintendency?
- (2) Having served as a superintendent in a rural community, how do they actually prioritize the importance of these responsibilities?
- (3) How have their priorities evolved over time?

The reason for this comparison is to describe superintendent perceptions of priorities in rural school districts in order to add to the body of research of rural schools.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Although the focus of this dissertation is rural school superintendents, this literature review will focus mainly on the superintendency in general and how it relates to the rural superintendent. Murphy, Peterson, and Hallinger (1986) identified nine control areas (i.e. areas of responsibility) consisting of: *selection; socialization; supervision; evaluation; rewards/sanctions; goals; resource allocation; behavior; and, technological specifications*. Kowalski (2006) described the roles and responsibilities of the superintendent as: *superintendent/school board relationships; leadership; resource management; human resource management; and community leadership*. This chapter is organized into five sections describing a conceptual framework for understanding the behaviors and perceptions of superintendents and their role as the chief administrator within a traditional public school district. The first section describes the superintendents' roles in *selection, socialization, and monitoring behavior control*. The second discusses the roles of the superintendent in regards to *supervision and evaluation*. The third, discusses the superintendent's role in the development of *goals and resource allocation*. The fourth, describes the *board of education/superintendent relationship*. Lastly, the fifth section explores the superintendent's role in the *understanding the community*.

Selection, Socialization, and Monitoring

Selection. Superintendents can affect the quality of a district and its focus on curriculum and instruction by exerting control over the selection and hiring, by exerting control through recruitment and purposefully having more of an impact on hiring staff than their peers in suburban and urban schools (Hallinger, 2003). Effective schools positively influence the learning outcomes of K-12 students and raise student achievement. Highly effective schools typically pay

top salaries and recruit more aggressively than districts that are less effective (Brown & Hunter, 1986). This mindset is supported by evidence from business and industry when successful businesses focus on hiring the people that best fit into their system. Forner, Bierlein-Palmer, and Reeves (2012) observed that superintendents in rural schools must ensure high quality teachers in each classroom because they are a critically important factor in determining student academic success. Candidates must display honesty, integrity and possess a solid work ethic and are committed to students.

In general, superintendents must ensure that teachers strengthen and improve pedagogy by utilizing research-based practices in their staff development and continuing education programs. However, rural schools are sometimes different. Strauss (1999) found in hiring practices of Pennsylvania rural schools that they had a dysfunctional penchant for hiring candidates with ties to the local community, which he traced, in part, to indirect conflicts of interests in hiring relatives or friends. Rural school officials were willing to sacrifice academic credentials in favor of ties to the community. Monk (2007) gave an example:

. . . that if teachers with better academic credentials leave a rural school after very short periods of employment, it could be rational for the hiring authorities at that school to prefer other candidates whom they believe will stay in place longer. This could then translate into a preference for candidates who grew up in the vicinity of the school, even at the risk of introducing elements of provincialism into school operations (p. 164).

Hiring local candidates leads to greater retention of teachers, especially in areas where resources are scarce but, G. Petersen and Barnett (2005) contend that school districts must recruit and retain highly qualified teachers in all classrooms which raises the question of whether the selection of high-quality teachers would be mutually exclusive from hiring locally.

Marzano and Waters (2009) suggest that superintendents should be involved in the selection process by monitoring non-negotiable goals for instruction. However, they believe it

should be addressed by developing a system designed to continuously improve the pedagogical skills of teachers.

One aspect that rural superintendents must be aware of is isolation. Schwartzbeck, Prince, Redfield, Morris, and Hammer (2003) Schwartzbeck, 2003 discovered in a national survey of rural superintendents in the United States the necessity of addressing isolation as it relates to teacher recruitment and retention. The top three factors responsible for difficulties in attracting and retaining teachers in the rural school district are low salaries, social isolation, and geographic isolation. Being involved and part of the community is important. Bornfield (1997) discussed that the greatest determining factor was the teacher or staff members' rootedness to the community. Hammer, Hughes, McClure, Reeves, and Salgado (2005) suggest offering targeted incentives such as differential pay for teachers in high demand subject areas in order to attract and retain new teachers to the rural school. Other incentives include offering signing bonuses, retention bonuses, school-loan forgiveness programs and others if the staff member stays past the first year. Getting the community involved can also play an important role in welcoming and retaining new teachers (Hammer et al., 2005).

Socialization. The term used to describe the process of adapting or conforming to common needs is *socialization*. Socialization is used to describe activities of the superintendent which are designed to orientate and induct individuals to a common set of organizational values. Peterson (1984) describes socialization as "internalized supervision" (p. 580). When socialization is accomplished by superintendents, subordinates reflect or model their own behavior upon the criteria modeled and set in place by superintendents.

Socialization is an important mechanism of superintendent control over teachers, principals, board members and the community. Peterson (1984) found that superintendents

select individuals who are already socialized to the norms and values of the organization by showing a greater tendency of superintendents hiring principals who were already socialized to the organization. Superintendents are more likely to hire from within the district especially as the size of the district becomes larger. Principals within the district were the most frequently hired, followed by assistant principals within the district, followed lastly, by principals from outside the district. (Peterson, 1984).

The primary means of socializing subordinates is through staff development. Peterson et.al. (1987), while providing a description of the socialization process for principals in their study, found that mandatory principal participation in staff development activities focusing on curriculum and instruction were highly beneficial. If a district had a preferred district-wide instructional model then training in the model was priority. Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) found that professional development involves the social construction of professional-practice expectations through mentoring, peer sharing and critique, and systematic induction. Carefully constructed and implemented staff development activities are essential for not only new staff but for veteran staff as well. If not, the status quo may be maintained rather than nurturing positive or effective innovation.

Not all methods are as direct as staff development. In direct demonstration to subordinates, superintendents may also socialize subordinates in their values by modeling desired behavior (Peterson, 1987). It is beneficial for the superintendent to understand the importance of role modeling. Filstad's (2004) and Korte's (1999) studies on the use of role models in organizational socialization is important. These studies relate that new employees use supervisors and co-workers as role models through observation, interaction, and communication. New employees must have several role models available to help their learning processes and the

need for determining their roles in the organization. They typically engage through informal communities of practice. Strategically, managers can provide the new employee with role models who possess the personal characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors that they want the new employee to learn and emulate (Filstad, 2004; Korte, 2009).

Direct communication is also another form of socialization. Behrens (1989) writes that talking about one's vision with conviction and in a way that commands interest is key in getting other's acceptance. This is charismatic leadership that is exhibited by the superintendent to socialize their community, organization and personnel to their (the superintendents) vision for the district (Howell & Shamir, 2005). However, there is one detrimental aspect of this approach, Collins (2001) found that the strength of personality of the leader can be a worthwhile characteristic but can cause problems when charisma is used in the wrong way, or, after the charismatic leader leaves the organization. Howell (1988) defines two types of charismatic leadership: socialized and personalized. *Socialized leaders* exhibit socially constructive and egalitarian behaviors and influence followers through the process of internalization. They develop their subordinate's goals through their wants, their needs, and their development. By meeting these goals they create an environment of autonomy, which survives beyond the leader's tenure in an organization (Howell, 1988). *Personalized leaders* on the other hand, exhibit personally dominant and authoritarian behavior, which leads to close relationships between the leaders and subordinates. While goals come from the subordinates, the goals set by the personalized leader emanate from the leader and are based on the leader's motivations, wants, needs, and development. Since they evoke feelings of obedience and loyalty, dependence and conformity develops. The net result is that their influence rarely continues after their departure from an organization (Fatt, 2000).

Principals and teachers who have accepted their superintendent's goals as their own are more likely to support those goals. Marzano and Waters (2009) describes this as "defined autonomy" where superintendents encourage subordinates to assume responsibility for the districts success. Kenneth Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) call this "collective efficacy", where superintendents build an organization through socialization in which subordinates view the overall success of the district as their own collectively. In addition, the socialization of board members and community also has an influence upon the direction of the district.

Monitoring. With the emphasis on goal setting to improve districts, some processes must be defined for monitoring progress toward goal attainment and the degree to which subordinates are implementing programs. Feedback is the most powerful modification that enhances achievement (Hattie, 1992). Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) suggest that feedback does not occur automatically but rather has to be designed. It is the responsibility of the superintendent to solicit and monitor feedback specifically in the area of effectiveness of school practices in terms of their impact on student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005). This original feedback or monitoring is considered an incremental change process. In other words, incremental change can be the next most logical step a district takes. The responsibility of monitoring incremental change involves keeping track of students at a general level (Marzano et al., 2005). Deep change is second-order and fundamentally alters the system and requires new thinking and acting on the part of the district. The responsibility of monitoring in deep change is to monitor the effects of the innovation (Marzano et al., 2005).

School districts utilize monitoring to ensure that schools are accomplishing their stated goals. Marzano and Waters (2009) recommend that data are collected and monitored in a

systematic and uniform manner. In doing so, the district monitors the effectiveness of individual principals and teachers by correlating teachers' skills at using the strategies in the instructional model with student engagement in learning.

Supervision and Evaluation

Supervision and Evaluation. Supervision is the active oversight of schools and school processes through onsite visits. Supervision is the glue to a successful school (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2012). Oliva and Pawlas (2004) found that supervision is a means of offering specialized help in improving instruction in a collegial, collaborative, and professional setting. Formal and informal evaluations are the controls the superintendent exerts over the content and process of personnel evaluation. When the focus of supervision is on teaching and learning, evaluation is an unavoidable aspect of this process (Sergiovanni, 2001). Palandra (2010) agrees that supervision and evaluation are inextricably connected. You cannot have one without the other.

Superintendents are expected to supervise principals and teachers in a school district. Bjork (1993) found that superintendents should use their position to improve instruction through supervision. Superintendents demonstrating high visibility in schools and classrooms has been linked to instructionally effective schools (Bjork, 1993; Carter, Glass, & Hord, 1993). G. J. Petersen (1999) discovered that superintendents modeled the importance of instruction to principals, teachers, and students by their visits to the school and classrooms. The superintendents of the California study from the early 1980's were actively involved in the supervision of schools and visited schools frequently (Murphy & Hallinger, 1986; Murphy et al., 1986; Peterson, Murphy, & Hallinger, 1987). Although frequency of school visits is important, it is the purpose of the visits coupled with the actions of superintendents during the visits that is

key. In Petersen's (1999) study, superintendents believed that their personal presence in buildings accomplished three things: 1) demonstration of teacher support; 2) monitoring of classroom instruction; and 3) to get a first-hand account of what was going on at the various sites. The superintendents in the study enjoyed site visits and felt that their presence showed their support of teachers and of what they were trying to accomplish. They were also an opportunity to assess the technical core operations of the school. Lastly, they felt visits were a way of managing and reinforcing district goals by talking with principals and teachers about various programs goals and objectives as well as observing first hand if district goals are being reached by observing student work (Petersen, 1999). This is also a form of modeling. The keeper of the vision has to signal what is important and do so in many ways. "You signal by what you write. You signal by what you say. You signal by what you do" (Peterson, 1999, p. 8).

Wallace (1996) supports the notion of the superintendents' supervision function because the superintendent should emphasize instructional leadership in their own leadership behavior for principals, teachers and others to emulate. On the other hand, Meyer (1984) likens school visits by superintendents to that of a *General reviewing the troops* and suggests that the activity has no practical function beyond celebration, which is seen as a positive interaction.

Cuban (1984) challenges the notion that the desirability of superintendents in direct supervision of curriculum and instruction is based more upon "faith and folk wisdom" (p.145) than research, and points out that describing superintendents as instructional leaders is reminiscent of the superintendents of the past whose role was highly integrated into the school and classroom:

A century ago, superintendents had to teach teachers what to do in classrooms; they inspected what was taught, listened to children recite, taught classes, and in general, were unmistakably visible in the school program. That model of superintendent as

instructional leader gave way to a managerial approach that has dominated the superintendency for the last two generations. With the mounting interest in using effective schools research, the older model of a school chief knowledgeable about both curriculum and instruction and visible beyond symbolic tour is reasserting itself (Cuban, 1984, pp. 145-146).

In urban schools this may not be the case, but in rural schools, the superintendent must understand the complexity of the school system and become more of an instructional leader. Superintendents are today's learning leaders. They develop leadership capacity in others in their schools and district. Leadership resides with the whole school community rather than solely those who hold formal position of authority (King, 2002). Cuttress, Fullan, and Kilcher (2005) noted that building capacity and developing a culture centered on learning are key variables that support organizational change. Every superintendent must have a focus on raising student performance through skillful orchestration and expertise (Augustine-Shaw, 2016).

Cuban believed that it is unlikely that district-wide improvement can be achieved "without a superintendent who sustains higher than usual involvement in the district's instructional program" (p. 146). Monitoring the technical core of the school and the leadership behaviors of the principal is the purpose of the high visibility in schools. Effective leaders apply indirect influence on the capacity of school to improve, yet the influence does not always come from the superintendents but can be provided by principals and teachers (Ken Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999). The primary force motivating students to succeed academically is quality instruction, but quality leaders affect the motivation of teachers and the quality of instruction they provide (Fullan, 2007; Sergiovanni, 1999).

The personal supervision of principals by superintendents is the most common method used to understand what is happening in district schools (Petersen, 1999). Vitcov and Bloom (2010) suggest that principal leadership in a building is second only to teacher quality in

improving schools. They believe that superintendents should help principals grow their own leadership capacities and have several considerations for superintendents. First, superintendents should make principal supervision a primary responsibility, not an afterthought. Next, superintendents should receive training in the supervision process and should have ongoing opportunities for reflection and professional development to improve their own practices. The primary focus of principal supervision should be on improving the performance of the principal by developing an effective evaluation model upon a shared understanding of what is expected of the principal. The more effective the principal evaluation is the more the performance of the principal improves. The relationship with the principal should be a coaching relationship which is ongoing and connected to the principal's growth each year. Principal supervision should be aligned with the districts vision, goals, and plans. Professional standards have to be linked to concrete goals and evidence of school and district progress. Principal supervision should be driven by the vision of the superintendent and principal as leaders of professional learning communities (Vitcov & Bloom, 2010). Time spent coaching and developing the leadership capacity of principals and staff members is more likely to raise expectations than time spent evaluating. Evaluation is based upon minimum standards while coaching is used to reach greatness. Schools that plan for teacher coaching show the true value of professional development. Feedback is also important. People that have confidence in the ability to succeed are more likely to succeed and will solicit feedback more frequently (Barkley, Bottoms, Feagin, & Clark, 2001).

The most considerable influence over the behavior of teachers and principals is the criteria used to evaluate them. By exercising this control the superintendent can influence the focus of instruction and principal's instructional leadership. The alignment of evaluation criteria

with the district vision, goals and strategic plans is essential. Every principal is responsible for their own school-based goals that are tied to district and superintendents goals (Vitcov & Bloom, 2010). Wallace (1996) describes how he implemented a system of supervision and evaluation called PRISM (Pittsburg Research-based Instructional Supervision Model). The system is based upon a modified version of Madeline Hunter's instructional model with clinical supervision as the means of evaluating teacher performance. A component of the PRISM was an emphasis on the development of principal leadership skills and the evaluation of principals based upon those skills.

Childress (2007) found that schools must develop evaluation systems and structures for ensuring accountability. Most school districts develop their evaluation systems and structures based upon generation after generation of school reform efforts. They tend to endure long after the reform fades. According to Childress in San Francisco, the superintendent worked with principals and teachers to establish evaluation systems and structures that were based upon student performance data.

Other examples of evaluation processes, with accountability for results as one of the primary components of both the teacher and principal evaluation are found in the reported evaluation procedures in Pittsburg (Wallace, 1996) and the California Study (Murphy et al., 1986; Peterson et al., 1987). There is evidence from Childress (2012) that superintendents may employ a system of evaluation that links building objectives with district goals and instructional objectives.

Goals and Resource Allocation

Goals. Emphasis of the importance of superintendents establishing district goals for the purpose of improving schools has been reviewed in literature (Jacobson, 1988; Waters & Marzano, 2006). The development of district goals provide a focus of attention in the improvement of schools. Superintendents use goals to provide rationale and justification for their actions and direction of the district and as motivation of other district personnel. Every superintendent and district has the goal of improving their district.

Organizational participants use goals for many purposes. Goals that are used in guiding the selection of alternative courses of action are *cognitive functions*. Goals also have *motivational properties*, serving as a source of identification and commitment for participants and *symbolic properties* appeal to external contingencies. Goals frequently provide justification for past actions and provide criteria for the evaluation of performance, participants and programs of actions (Scott, 2003).

Based on their research, Marzano and Waters (2009) concluded that for districts to reach their improvement goals, collaborative goal setting is the vehicle that must be used to get there. This would indicate that superintendents should establish and support effective structures that include all appropriate members of the school district team. This team should include but not be limited to the superintendent, school board members, principals, teachers, students, and members of the community. This creates an atmosphere of creative problem solving regarding the goal of improvement of the district. Ward (2007) agrees on the importance of engaging all stakeholders in the goal setting process stating that “it’s the smart thing to do---and the right thing to do” (p.20). But, he also provides the following caution:

While practitioners and others with a stake in improving schools should help solve big picture challenges, board members and administrators should be careful in deciding who to engage in the process and how to engage them. You must consider first whether prospective participants are ready, willing and able to play a role (p. 27).

For meaningful change to occur in schools, district leaders must work with all stakeholders to achieve success. There is a conscious effort by the superintendent to share decision making in developing the districts mission and vision and keeping goals constantly visible and to maintaining consistency of action (Green & Etheridge, 2001). Stakeholder groups from the rural community and school district participate in training workshops, retreats, or conferences where they examine local issues and came to know each other through a process that modeled shared decision making. Green and Etheridge (2001) documented that experimentation occurred without the fear of failure in the study of eleven school districts that successfully established standards, assessment, and accountability measures. There was an established culture that enabled disagreement, mistakes, and even failures to occur without the risk of failure. Risk taking was encouraged so people felt free to innovate, fail, and learn. Shared goals were established through community and professional consensus and emerged from collaborative meetings with stakeholders (Green & Etheridge, 2001).

In developing goals into a strategic plan the community's participation in developing and implementing the strategic plan provides a means for district leaders to communicate to the community that their input was highly regarded while strengthening ties to the community (Winand & Edlefson, 2008). A strategic plan that includes the knowledge of community opinion can draw together various stakeholders in the education process. If planned and communicated properly, school districts will gain public support and are less likely to face criticism (Gallagher, Bagin, & Kindred, 1997).

In addressing goals, it is essential that as each goal in the strategic plan is developed that it include the use of SMART goals (Doran, 1981). SMART goals are: (a) **S**pecific: Be specific about what is to be accomplished; (b) **M**easurable: Identify how the goal will be measured; (c) **A**ttainable: Ensure that capacity exists to accomplish the goal; (d) **R**esults Based: Identify the benchmarks and outcomes for the goal; (e) **T**ime-bound: Set a specific- timeframe for completion of the goal. SMART goals commonly are used in strategic planning by government, industry, consulting groups, small businesses, nonprofit organizations and school districts (O'Neill, 2000).

O'Neill (2000) contends that SMART goals are results oriented and not process oriented. *Process oriented goals* are geared toward activities, programs, and instructional methods and would be similar to formative evaluations. *Result oriented goals*, a type of summative evaluation, are measured by a test score, rubric system or some other quantifiable tool or method (O'Neill, 2000). O'Neill describes how each specific goal is outlined for the opening day's activity, and it is imperative that SMART sub-goals be determined for each goal. Goals selected should be informed by data about how students currently perform. Item analysis of standardized test, classroom assessments, and national research studies, coupled with intuition and common sense. Targets that are set should be both challenging and realistic, given time and resource constraints (O'Neill, 2000). Ideally the development of SMART goals would lead to a behavior change for both the teachers in the individual classrooms and the individual administrators. Teachers would become more collaborative and continue to seek new ways to improve instruction. Behavior changes could lead to continued reflection of practice thus increasing student achievement as

teacher become more learned in the new standards and the new instructional materials (O'Neill, 2000).

Superintendents must define accountability measures based upon the SMART goals and hold the administration up to high expectations to ensure that the initiative will succeed. Principals in turn must hold teachers accountable for the new instructional practices and assessments by meeting regularly with them to reflect on walkthrough and expectations. Continued follow up/training/support is essential in ensuring that this initiative becomes successful. Based on a study of superintendents providing goals for principals, Danna and Spatt (2013) concluded that superintendents who collaborate with principals in goal setting; who are involved in curricular, instructional and assessment decisions; who monitor progress; and who support building leaders with resources and professional development tied to district goals should have a measurable impact on student learning.

Resource allocation. Resource allocation focuses on the superintendents' control of resources, allocation of resources and the processes superintendents use to acquire funding. Researchers have focused on superintendent actions with the acquisition of funds (Jacobson, 1988; Spillane, 1996). Cuban (1984) found that effective schools research shows no correlation between the level of spending and school effectiveness; however he notes that improving schools is an expensive proposition. In a contradiction to what Cuban discovered, to improve, districts have hired additional staff which in turn increases district revenue requirements.

Gaining support of local businesses is frequently described as important. (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001) recognized the importance of financial support from donors to support teacher initiatives, staff development and other activities. Childress (2007) found that the Boston superintendent Payzant secured money from private sources and ensured that it

supported, rather than diluted, the district's efforts to implement its strategy toward attainment of its goal for improvement. Payzant met with potential donors explaining the districts strategy and made it clear that he would not accept funds that distracted the district from carrying out its mission. Sometimes this meant turning down funding, but in other instances it meant that foundations or private enterprises could interpret their own missions more broadly and be able to support initiatives that they would have otherwise rejected (Childress, 2007). Business contributions do not provide the primary source of funding for public education. The primary source of funding continues to be the local and state revenue in the form of tax dollars and state aid but it helps to have the support of the community and business.

In relation to superintendents' actions regarding resource allocation and the acquisition of funds, there is a common pattern. District entities and stakeholders offer ideas that are considered initially as guidance and prioritized, then district goals are publicly established and formally approved by the board and through this process, generates board, community and business support. A budget is then developed to fund the programs in order to reach the goals. With this broad array of support the superintendent's likelihood of obtaining funding to support the programs raises.

Board of Education/Superintendent Relationship

One of the cornerstones of the foundation of any school system is the relationship between the board of education and the superintendent. Perhaps no relationship in a school district has a bigger impact on the education of children than the relationship between the board and its superintendent (Kowalski, 2006). As in many similar leadership-based relationships, communication serves as the most important issue at the heart of an effective working relationship between a board and its superintendent (Chalker, 1999; Kowalski, 2006; Tift, 1990).

Other factors that relate to a positive working relationship include mutual respect and a clear understanding of each other's role, responsibilities, and expectations (Tift, 1990). Good communication is the basis for shared understanding. Chalker (1999) found that besides communication as the dominate theme is board-superintendent relationship, interpersonal relations and human relations were critical as well. There should be a clear line of communication and a trusting relationship between the board and superintendent (Hutsell, 2009).

Common goals and expectations need to be developed between the board and the superintendent. Tift (1990) outlines that there are several principles involved in developing an atmosphere to create good relationships. First, development of a common vision or goal. Second, development of strategies to reach that goal or vision. Third, establishment of a monitoring procedure to ensure that the strategies implemented are progressing toward goal or vision attainment. Fourth, role definitions must be established in order to understand what is expected of both the board and superintendent. Chalker (1999) emphasizes thinking of the board-superintendent relationship as a "team" emphasizes the importance of this principle. Lastly, the basis of relationships must be the establishment of trust (Tift, 1990).

Kowalski (2006) agrees that superintendent must have a vision of what is to be accomplished. Further, the board and superintendent "should identify normative standards for leadership and management behavior and ideal associations between the superintendent and board members" (Kowalski, 1999, p. 148). Discussion with the board prior to adoption of normative standards should include mutual role expectations, communication, and problem solving behaviors. Once an acceptable board-superintendent relationship vision has been established, strategies must be put into place to achieve the vision (Kowalski, 1999). These procedures should include procedural behaviors that the board-superintendent will use in

treatment of each other. These behaviors include honesty, continuous communication, fairness, cooperation, and assistance. The goals of procedural behaviors are to develop mutual respect, trust, effectiveness, and a commitment to continuous improvement (Kowalski, 1999).

As may be expected with any organization, success in school districts depends on a good working relationship between the board and its superintendent. Much like a successful marriage, this relationship needs continuous attention (Tift, 1990). School boards and superintendents need to monitor and evaluate their relationship. Kowalski (1999) suggests periodic board retreats for in-depth conversations about long-term goals and plans or the establishment of standing committees designed to address critical areas. Boards should self-evaluate and share the results with the superintendent and the community who elected them. Some boards ask the superintendent to evaluate the board's performance (Kowalski, 1999). The latter places the superintendent in a tenuous situation of possibly creating conflict which could lead to potential retribution since the board serves as the superintendent's employer.

McCormick found that when board members strive for cooperation rather than unanimity, engage in frank discussion, respect others, promote compromise, involve the superintendent, and attend retreats or consider self-evaluations, harmonious and effective working relationships will result (as found in Chalker, 1999, p. 75-76).

Understanding the Community

Superintendents whether in urban or rural districts are the visible "face" of the school district, but superintendents in rural schools are continually in the spotlight and exposed to the public (Jenkins, 2007). Although not necessarily true in urban or suburban districts, the rural superintendent is the sole-decision maker in the district and therefore must be solely responsible for the decisions they make (Jenkins, 2007). And with this responsibility frequently comes direct

community feedback outside of working hours (e.g., dinner in a local restaurant, attending sporting events, after attending worship services).

Because of their visibility, rural school superintendents feel as if they are under constant scrutiny and face continual criticism. Although visibility can place a superintendent in a “fishbowl” (p.29) in rural schools, it can also be a positive contributor to the school culture (Jenkins, 2007). Superintendents are continually making difficult decisions that affect the local community. Consideration of a community’s reactions when making a decision is critical for a superintendent in rural schools (Jenkins, 2007). In order to understand their community’s reactions rural superintendents need to have a political competency in order to be effective in their school districts. Politics are a reality in every school district and it is inherent for superintendents to learn to work within their districts unique political reality (Farmer, 2009). It is the choice of the school leader to be visible that promotes a positive culture within the school community (Fiore, 2000).

To promote positive school culture the superintendent must know and understand the rural community and the knowledge of their thinking. Tift (1990) suggests developing or updating a school-community profile as a critical component in understanding the community. The profile should include the following: 1) The physical setting of the community. This portion is inherent to the superintendent in knowing the location, natural resources, characteristics, and relationship of the community in the region. 2) Human resource information should be collected on population factors, age and gender patterns, educational levels of population groups, labor force structure, income levels, resident mobility patterns, and ethnic and minority groups. 3) Determination of the levels of social organization in the community including economic, health, transportation, governmental organization, educational services, recreational services and

voluntary organizations. 4) The cultural expectations of the community should be determined by learning how the community deals with changes and what value patterns are exhibited by the community. Consideration should also be given to how conflict is resolved and situations to avoid. 5) Information should be gathered on the power and leadership patterns in the district and whom, what and how that power is used in the community. 6) Social psychology of the community. This includes determining the aspirations and expectations of the community and the amount of pride and the sense of community (Tift, 1990). In addition to developing this profile for internal use, it may prove beneficial for local realtors who want to provide insights into the local school district for potential home buyers.

There are several ways to gather this information on the community. Belonging to service clubs and knowing where to get information is critical. Continual listening is a must with triangulation of recurrent topics to confirm the importance of issues and concerns. Being inquisitive, sometimes naïve about local events that the community shows pride in. Accept invitations carefully and prepare for local visits by inquiring of issues beforehand. Lastly, reflect on all experiences and write down impressions (Tift, 1990). Kowalski (2006) found that by participating in local service clubs, service on city and county boards, and attending public functions broaden the superintendent's understanding of the community's needs, sentiments, and social information. All of which is critical in developing and building support for visions (Kowalski, 2006).

Both Farmer (2009) and Kowalski (2006) outline practices to utilize when making difficult decisions. Clearly communicate your district's objectives to patrons and then begin identifying and forming political coalitions with power players. Do not exclude those resistant to change but rather befriend them and communicate to them and understand and empathize with

their various points of view. Be honest about differing opinions. Lastly, collaborate by including all stakeholders in the decision making process which builds coalitions for overcoming future challenges (Farmer, 2009; Kowalski, 2006).

By understanding the local community, its politics and how to implement effective practices, a superintendent can become an effective superintendent especially if applied to a rural superintendent position.

Research Questions

Chapter Two presented an overview of existing knowledge supporting this study's exploration into understanding the behaviors and perceptions of superintendents of their roles in their districts. The purpose of this study is to investigate how rural superintendents in Kansas identify their priorities and describe or attempt to answer the research questions regarding a comparison of:

- (1) In an ideal situation, looking back to when they were first hired as a superintendent, how do superintendents describe the priority of their responsibilities upon accepting their first superintendency?
- (2) Having served as a superintendent in a rural community, how do they actually prioritize the importance of these responsibilities?
- (3) How have their priorities evolved having actually served as a rural superintendent?

These research questions focus on five separate areas which encompass the major areas of a rural superintendent's responsibility. These five areas include: 1) selection, socialization, and retention; 2) supervision and evaluation; 3) goals and resource allocation; 4) board of education/superintendent relationship; and 5) understanding the community. The purpose of this comparison is to identify, evaluate, and describe any patterns of superintendents' priorities in rural school districts. This study addresses the lack of academic research on rural schools and rural school leadership by providing knowledge regarding the work and practice of current rural superintendents.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Although superintendents have many roles and responsibilities, this study addressed five major areas in which a superintendent operates and their perceptions of the priority of their responsibilities. This study was designed to describe patterns and trends of superintendents' perceptions of their priorities in rural school districts based on a survey and follow-up interviews.

Research Design

This study uses a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative measures to collect and analyze data on superintendents in rural settings. It follows a two-phase, sequential mixed methods approach that obtained quantitative results from a purposefully selected sample and then followed up by interviewing selected individuals to probe or explore those results in more depth. The quantitative measure utilized a survey of rural Kansas superintendents to describe the priority of their responsibilities when they were first hired as a superintendent as compared to how they actually prioritize the importance of these responsibilities. In the second phase, qualitative interviews were used to probe significant findings from the quantitative measure by exploring how their priorities have evolved while actually serving as a rural superintendent. The results of the qualitative interviews were given priority because of the interest of this researcher, the particular audience, and the perceptual data that was being sought (Creswell, 2003).

Merriam (2009) states, "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 5). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state that: "Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, in an effort to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings that people bring to them" (p. 3). Given these statements,

qualitative research provided the best opportunity for readers to better understand the lived experiences of the rural sample superintendents.

Y. Lincoln and Guba (2001) renamed the concepts of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The four concepts have been adopted by qualitative researchers and in contrast to quantitative data, which is more concerned with the former; these concepts reflect the underlying assumptions in qualitative research. Credibility depends upon the accurate interpretation of results of the research participants (Creswell, 2007), and transferability is the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied to other situations (Merriam, 2009). Dependability, similar to reliability, is concerned whether the research is repeatable and if the researcher would obtain the same or similar results if the study were conducted a second time (Merriam, 2009) , and confirmability refers to the extent that the findings of a study are shaped by its respondents (Foundation, 2008). It is the intent of the study to keep these concepts at the forefront when conducting surveys, interviews and analyzing responses. Triangulation of data will come from survey questions, interview questions, and field notes.

Merriam (2009) found that phenomenological research studies are interested in *lived experiences* and the study of people's perceptions of their world. Maxwell (2013) describes a case study as the purposeful selection which justifies the selection of a particular case in terms of the goals of the study and existing theory and research. The superintendents in this research study were asked to describe their *lived experiences* by describing their perceptions of a rural superintendent's duties and responsibilities. In this context, this study serves as a case study in the context that superintendents are studied in a particular context (rural Kansas school districts) in order to generalize or meet transferability requirements.

Population Sample

The superintendents purposefully selected to participate in this study were from rural school districts in Kansas. According to the NCES (2006) definition of rural schools, there are 221 rural school districts in the state of Kansas. The sample surveyed and studied consisted of superintendents in 146 rural school districts which range in size from approximately 300 to 1200 students, which are considered rural. Further, the sample will not include superintendents who serve in the dual role of superintendent and building principal. Districts were selected from a list generated by the Kansas Department of Education and the National Center for Education Statistics (KSDE, 2016; NCES, 2006). It is the intent of this study to utilize all participants in order to reach a higher level of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Y. S. Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data Collection

Qualitative research, particularly a case study format, can yield data collected from a variety of sources to convey a thick description of a phenomena under study. This can be accomplished through the use of interviews, observational data, and/or surveys (Merriam, 2009). For this dissertation, data was collected from three different sources in order to triangulate data and improve credibility: 1) administrative data about rural district demographics and superintendents; 2) survey of rural Kansas superintendents; and 3) interviews of purposefully selected rural superintendents (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2009).

Administrative data. Administrative data was collected from the Kansas Association of School Boards surveys on superintendents (Hays, 2014) and the Kansas State Department of Education. These data were then merged with data collected from the National Center for Education Statistics (2006). The data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2006)

includes a list of rural school districts in Kansas as defined by NCES (2006). The data was exported to Microsoft Excel and disaggregated to sort and identify trends.

Survey instrument. Since no known survey instruments existed that would address the research questions, I chose to develop an ad hoc survey instrument using questions generated by current superintendents. Eighteen current superintendents were given the list of the five major areas to be studied and each was asked to provide two questions for each area. Based on these queries for questions, the instrument resulted in 26 sub-questions to be used in the survey.

Survey of rural school superintendents. While surveys or descriptive designs are useful to collect data intended to describe a relationship between events and phenomena (Merriam, 2009), this study's generalizability is severely limited. However, the survey results are an important part of the case description, and provided useful insights. Utilizing surveys allows the researcher to generalize from a sample to a population so that inferences may be made about some characteristic, attitude, or behavior of this population (E. Babbie, 1990). Surveys of superintendent perceptions were utilized because of the economy of design and the ability to obtain quick results. Superintendents were asked to reflect back in time on what they believed to be essential priorities prior to becoming a superintendent as compared those same priorities now as a superintendent. Surveys were web-based and administered online by inviting participants via email, which contained an informed consent approval question prior to starting the survey. The survey was developed using Qualtrics, a web-based tool for creating and distributing surveys (see Appendix A). Email addresses were obtained from the Directory of Superintendents from the Kansas State Department of Education (2017). Prior to sending the survey link out to rural superintendents, an introductory email describing the purpose and nature of the study was sent (see Appendix C). All email communication and the survey instrument were approved by the

dissertation committee proposal committee and KU's Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) (see Appendix C and E).

The emails were sent to survey participants requesting responses in a two-week window. Halfway through that window a reminder email was sent to those who had not completed the survey to request their participation in the study. Response or participation rate was critical at this juncture. Babbie (2007) in a review of social research found that 50 percent response rate is considered adequate for analysis and report. The goal for participation rate in this study was 50 percent with hopefully a larger turnout that can be attributed to follow-up reminders and phone calls. To increase participation after ten days a reminder email was again sent as well as this researcher making a personal phone call to ensure that participation was increased.

Advantages of a web-based survey are the low costs, automation, and design flexibility (E. R. Babbie, 2007). Participants had the convenience to answer on their own schedule and did not have to face an interviewer. Real-time access was given to the researcher as soon as the participant completed the survey. Disadvantages included possible cooperation problems because participants are continually bombarded by requests for surveys. Unlike interviews, the lack of an interviewer is a weakness because there is not an interviewer to clarify and probe to gain more reliable data.

The survey (see Appendix A) consisted of questions identifying district, number of years in current position, and the number of years of experience of the participant. Following the initial questions were 26 questions covering five areas which were measured on a Likert scale from *Not Important*, *Important*, to *Essential* based on rural superintendents' perceptions prior to becoming a superintendent and after serving as a superintendent.

Survey data analysis. Once completed, I began the initial analysis using Qualtrics and Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS version 25). Descriptive data were obtained regarding response rates, participation, and responses to survey questions. Survey data were analyzed descriptively by comparing previous perceptions of priorities to the current perceptions of priorities. Survey answers were analyzed to determine location, experience, as well as total years of experience. Answers to questions four through eight on the survey were coded and assigned a value as follows in SPSS: Not Important = 1; Important = 2; Essential = 3. Once coded and assigned they were run through a syntax program to code each part (prior or now) of questions four through eight. Once complete the prior and now questions were assigned the respondents single answer of not important, important, or essential to determine the survey respondents answer for comparison. Tables were then developed utilizing each of the survey responses to questions four through eight.

Interviews. In addition to the information gleaned from the surveys, follow-up interviews were conducted. From answers received on the surveys, six participants were interviewed regarding their perceptions in relationship to the research questions of this study. Interview candidates were selected based upon the number of years' experience as a superintendent and change in each survey questions answered. A range of experience was sought to determining if differences may exist how and why they identified what was essential prior to becoming a superintendent and after becoming a superintendent. Three of the six interview respondents had less than five years of experience. Similar to the surveys, superintendents were asked to reflect back in time on what they believed to be essential priorities prior to becoming a superintendent as compared those same priorities now as a superintendent. Superintendent interview respondents were asked about how and why they responded to specific

survey questions and answered pre-determined interview questions. Interviews are necessary when we cannot observe behavior, perceptions, or how people interpret the world around them. They are also necessary to put into context past events that are impossible to replicate (Merriam, 2009). The type of interviews used was person-to-person interviews either in person or via phone. Interviews were helpful because they were in-person interviews that were useful when participants could not be observed directly and allowed the interviewer to control the line of questioning.

Limitations of interviews are that they provide *indirect* information filtered through the views or perceptions of the interviewees and serve as examples of but are not representative of the larger survey sample. Further, a researcher's presence may bias responses and people may not equally articulate and be perceptive in all interviews. Further, interviewees were asked to think back in time, those memories may be influenced by factors and events that occurred since that point in time.

Interview participants were contacted by email with a request for a follow-up interview (see Appendix D) and, based on age, gender, race/ethnicity, were representative of the rural superintendent population. They were given a choice to interview face-to-face or via phone. No reference to names was used in the analysis of interviews. The interview was semi-structured and conformed to guidelines set forth by the HRPP at the University of Kansas. The interview guide approved by HRPP (see Appendix B and F) was utilized to conduct the interviews, which were audio recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed using the five areas outlined as areas of superintendents' responsibility, as related to the research questions.

Interview data analysis. Once completed, the interviews were self-transcribed using Microsoft Word. This allowed for sorting and categorization based on themes described in the

literature and themes that emerge from the data. Open coding was conducted on each of the interviews to begin the categorization process and for determining general themes in the data (Merriam, 2009). These themes were sent back to the interview participant in order to ensure participant validity. Interview respondent answers to why they answered the survey questions and how they answered the interview questions were then categorized separately by deductively applying the pre-existing framework of the five areas that a rural superintendent would operate in to form a descriptive analysis of the data. Further coding categories were developed by simultaneously reviewing each interview together. Once each category was identified, axial coding was conducted using the categories gleaned from the interviews, as well as those that emerged from the interviews. Once done, several rounds of synthesizing were conducted to integrate the data gathered and to limit the number of categories used without losing the accuracy or context of the participant's statement. Each answer was synthesized to one or two sentences, then to two or three words and finally to one word that would describe the respondents answer. Once all answers were coded then they were compared to find what topics were derived the most.

Final synthesis of data. The final data analysis is provided in Chapter Four. The goal of this final data synthesis was to address the research questions by identifying and describing the realistic and idealistic perceptions of superintendents' priorities in rural schools. The data was synthesized as described first utilizing descriptive analysis of the survey responses followed by open and axial coding of interview respondent answers to survey questions and to interview questions.

Chapter 4

Results

Imagine that you have just hung up the phone after accepting your first superintendency in a rural school district. The rush of emotions may overwhelm you as you realize your perceptions of an ideal situation might come to fruition over the next several months as you begin your career as a superintendent. Now imagine at the end of your first year, you reflect upon the actual day-to-day situations with which you have survived and hopefully succeeded. The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of superintendents in rural districts in Kansas and describe how differences in priorities may have evolved over time while actually serving as a rural superintendent, compared to the time before actually serving. Data were collected from a survey sent to 146 rural superintendents of which there were 92 respondents (63 percent response rate). Following the survey, six rural superintendents were interviewed to describe how their priorities may have evolved since officially taking on the superintendency. This chapter presents an analysis of the survey and interview data in order to address each of the research questions, and provide additional insights that may be induced from these data.

Demographics of participants

Respondents to this question came from 92 superintendents representing 93 school districts as shown in Figure 1. One superintendent has the dual role of superintendent in two school districts. Participants came from districts ranging in size from approximately 100 to 1200 students.

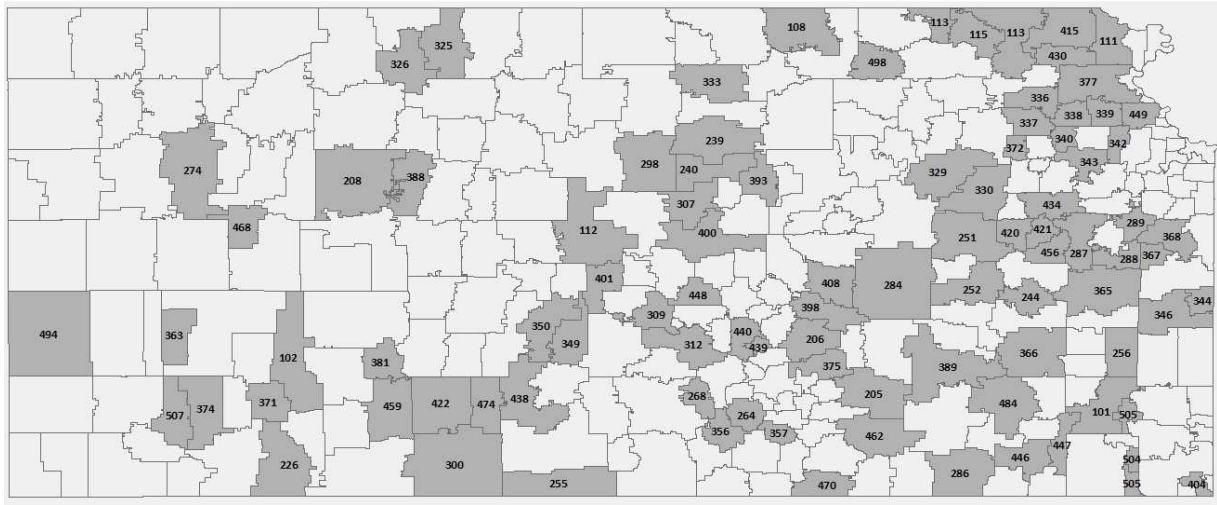


Figure 1. Locations of rural superintendent respondents, 2019 (source: Study Survey)

Table 1

Superintendent Experience(Survey Respondents), Number of Years

<u>Time</u>	<u>Current District</u>	<u>Experience Total</u>	<u>Initial Position</u>
0-5 years	65 (70.7%)	39 (42.4%)	32 (62.7%)
6-10 years	14 (15.2%)	20 (21.7%)	11 (21.6%)
11-15 years	9 (9.8 %)	16 (17.4%)	5 (9.8%)
15+ years	4 (4.3%)	17 (18.5%)	3 (5.9%)
Total	92	92	51

As shown in Table 1, the sample reflects a range of superintendent experience that provides a broad perspective in responses to the survey. The largest demographic of superintendents in the sample have been in their current district for zero to five years. Sixty-five respondents (70.7 percent) have been in their districts for less than five years. Similarly, 39 (42.4 percent) superintendents total experience has been less than five years, with 20 (21.7 percent) superintendents having 6 to 10 years of experience. The majority of participants reported being (62.7 percent or 32 superintendents) in their initial positions as superintendents with less than

five years of experience. The next highest percentage was 21.6 percent (11 superintendents) being in their initial positions as superintendent from 6 to 10 years.

The high number of superintendents who have been in their position less than five years is reflective of the high turnover experienced in the state of Kansas amongst all superintendents over the last five years. Twenty percent of Kansas districts started the 2016 school year under new leadership in the superintendent position which follows record-breaking turnover in the previous two years (Tobias, 2016) . Rural school districts particularly saw an increase in turnover over the last several years due to constraints on finances caused by a decrease of school funding from the legislature.

Demographics of interview participants.

Table 2

Superintendent Demographics (Interview Respondents)

	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>District Size*</u>	<u>Current District Experience**</u>	<u>Experience Total**</u>
Superintendent 1	Male	Caucasian	600	9	11
Superintendent 2	Male	Caucasian	500	2 ⁺	2
Superintendent 3	Male	Caucasian	350	7 ⁺	7
Superintendent 4	Male	Caucasian	500	2	4
Superintendent 5	Male	Caucasian	350	3	29
Superintendent 6	Male	Caucasian	900	3 ⁺	3

* Number of Students

** Number of Years

+ Initial Position

As shown in Table 2 six rural superintendents were interviewed for this study. The size of their districts ranged from 350 to 900 students. Experience as a superintendent ranged from two to 29 years with three superintendents in their first positions (two years, three years, and seven

years), two in their second positions as superintendent (four years, 11 years total) and one in his third superintendency (29 years total).

Participant results from Survey and Interview Questions.

The interview questions focused on the five areas in which a superintendent would operate (i.e., selection, socialization, and monitoring; supervision and evaluation; board of education/superintendent relationship; goals and resource allocation; understanding the community. Survey respondents were asked to respond to sub-questions within each of these areas by describing the level of importance at two points in time: 1) what they anticipated *prior to* serving, and 2) what they experienced *after becoming* a superintendent.

After receiving the results they were downloaded from Qualtrics and inputted into SPSS. There the data in survey questions were re-coded in order to understand more clearly how superintendents responded to their perceptions. The results to the questions in each area with the comparison of the number of responses from *Essential* prior to becoming a superintendent to *Essential* now (after) becoming a superintendent along with the percentage increase of *Essential* answers from participants are found in Table 8.

Only 91 responses of the 92 are utilized because one respondent did not answer questions properly (n=91). The survey measured sub-question responses to the five areas of focus on a 3 point Likert scale, ranging from *Not important (NI)*, *Important (I)*, and to *Essential (E)*. The instrument was designed to measure perceptions of superintendents based on 26 questions focusing on their priorities prior to being hired as a superintendent (*Prior*) compared to their perceptions after serving as a rural superintendent (*Now*).

Derived values. Percentage of *Essential* answers (%*E*) was determined by dividing the number of *Essential* answers in each area by the total number of participants (*n*). The percent *Essential* increase (%*E Inc*) is the percentage increase between the *Prior* and *Now* responses. The average percent increase (Avg. % *Inc.*) is the average percentage increase of superintendents choosing *Essential* between *Prior* and *Now* for the subcategory questions in each of the 5 major areas a superintendent would operate in.

As shown in Table 2, these survey results as well as the data from the interview participants will be utilized to discuss the research questions in the following categories:

- selection, socialization, and monitoring;
- supervision and evaluation;
- board/superintendent relationships;
- goals and resource allocation; and
- understanding the community.

It became apparent after observing the differences between the prior and current perceptions of each subcategory that utilizing the differences in *Essential* responses would be the best way to describe the perceptions of superintendents prior to becoming a superintendent as compared to the time after serving as a superintendent.

Interviews. Interview respondents were asked to respond to a series of questions on why they answered the survey questions as they did and also interviewed utilizing open-ended questions within each of the five major areas:

Selections, Socialization, and Monitoring: What is your involvement in teacher recruitment, induction, and retention in your school district? If a superintendent is to be involved in teacher recruitment and socialization, what do you perceive should be their role? Are you currently practicing what you perceive as the ideal role of the superintendent and if not, why?

Supervision and Evaluation: How would you describe your leadership style in regards to supervision and evaluation? Has being a superintendent changed your leadership style? If yes, what about the role of the superintendent has changed your leadership style?

Board of Education/Superintendent Relationship: Ideally, what do you feel you and your board of education should be doing to build relations? Currently what is your relationship with your board of education? What are the aspects or issues that are keeping you from reaching the ideal?

Goals and Resource Allocation: What do you feel is the superintendent's role in developing the vision and goals of the district? How do you go about developing the vision and goals in your district?

Understanding the Community: Should superintendents be involved in the local community? Why or Why not? Describe your involvement in the local community. Why is it different?

Selection, Socialization, and Monitoring

Table 3

Selection, Socialization, and Monitoring, Responses to survey with Percent Essential (Prior and Now)

	Prior				Now			
	<u>NI</u>	<u>I</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>%E</u>	<u>NI</u>	<u>I</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>%E</u>
Time spent on recruitment of teachers/principals?	5	62	24	26.4	1	24	66	71.7
Developing procedures to hire teachers/principals?	19	58	14	15.4	1	39	51	55.4
Characteristics of teachers/principals?	9	56	26	28.6	0	25	66	71.7
Interviewing for teachers?	5	47	38	41.8	3	40	47	51.1
Interviewing for principals?	8	51	32	35.2	0	10	81	88.0
Acclimate and retain staff members?	15	62	14	15.4	1	39	52	56.5
Average % Essential				27.1				65.8

As shown in Table 3, prior to becoming a superintendent survey respondents indicated that *interviewing for teachers* (41.8 percent), *interviewing for principals* (35.2 percent), and *characteristics of teachers/principals* (28.6 percent) were considered essential priorities. After becoming superintendents *interviewing for principals* (88 percent), *time spent of recruitment of teachers/principals* (71.7 percent) and *characteristics of teachers/principals* (71.7 percent) became the priorities for survey respondents.

Interview respondents described why they answered the survey questions in regard to interviewing and hiring principals:

Principals are the leaders of their respective buildings and are the most important hire for a superintendent. Like teachers, you must have the right person because they have such an impact on the success of students. (Superintendent 1)

We must ensure the principal fits the building, admin staff, and the district staff, ... they must know the building culture and have the right characteristics to be successful in the building. (Superintendent 4)

We must ensure we are hiring competent principals and teachers with an emphasis based upon experience in researched based instructional methods. (Superintendent 5)

Time spent on recruitment of teachers/principals was critical to interview respondents answers to survey questions:

The market for quality teachers is more difficult causing us to spend more time recruiting teachers and principals. The quality is good but the quantity is down. We must ensure we have the right procedures in place to get the best staff members. (Superintendent 1)

Before I became a superintendent I did not place and importance on recruiting. I changed because of going to superintendent meetings and hearing about the teacher shortage. Getting the right teachers/principals may cost more, but I think in the end you want to get the best people in your classrooms and building. (Superintendent 4)

With the teacher shortage you must recruit and retain quality teachers/principals. Developing procedures and recruiting and retaining

teachers is critical to the success of the district. Hiring competent people to work for you makes your job as superintendent easier. (Superintendent 5)

Further describing during interviews regarding recruitment and interviewing of staff (selection)

interviewed participants described:

... in rural schools ... superintendent's take on a bigger role than in larger districts... I am involved in a leadership academy, so that allows me to make some connections because we do mock interviews ... we're asking them whether they grew up in a rural area. We try to sell young professionals... we are an hour from Manhattan... two hours or less from Kansas City and Lawrence. We may be rural...but, you can live that lifestyle [suburban or urban] by not traveling very far... it must be sold to them as if you're young and have a family; this is a much better place to raise your family (Superintendent 1)

My role as superintendent in teacher recruitment ... setting the image of the district. When you are dealing in a people industry ... image attracts good people. If I get the chance to sit down and interview a teacher and I can give them a good impression ... I've laid the groundwork...or they know someone ... hired an elementary teacher out of college ... they were a friend of a friend of a friend. (Superintendent 2)

The bulk of my interviewing is done by my principals for teaching staff...final interviews, I will usually be in there at least for some of the interview ... we're pretty serious about them, and that's when money packages are discussed... take care of that piece of it. (Superintendent 3)

.... involved with job fairs, and going out and trying to recruit staff members... that's my biggest involvement, is to try to be more involved in those teacher fairs, job fairs...with building principals...we screened candidates with a committee of 8 to 9 people ... we interviewed as a team... had a meet and greet, question and answer session with anybody at the school that wanted to come in and be a part of that... I was heavily involved but just one person on the team. (Superintendent 6)

Two superintendents felt that it was important to recruit based upon the image of the district and why their district and community is a better fit than other districts and communities. One of the participants describes his experience as a member of the recruitment and hiring team while the other has a minimal part in interviewing and provides information about financial

packages and benefits. One superintendent felt they were not quite reaching the ideal quality standards on teacher recruitment as a district and felt they had to get involved:

...the why piece, the why not? Because our selection [from possible candidates is] small... we might be looking for this certain person... might not be the applicant that we actually get. For example, we have couple of spots open now ... before we start advertising, we are saying, Hey, we want this type of person. The building principals ... search for that... and we can't find that. That doesn't exist, so now, I'm more involved trying to get somebody. (Superintendent 4)

Socialization or induction of teachers through induction was varied in their responses:

... we have a staff orientation day, in-service day at the beginning ... all new staff and then ...all come down here (board office) for a couple of hours....talk about our policies, what we do, what we believe in and then later that day; they go out into the building and the community tour and work with their building principals... two days with our new staff. (Superintendent 5)

Our central office staff has time to get through some basic paperwork and information that needs to be dealt with... time with their building principals so they can go over expectations and information in the building... time with the technology department working with them ... time just to be in their room... assigned a mentor that works closely with them each year...a staff picnic at the beginning of the year for all staff. The Board of education along with our administration and directors put that on.... gets them off to a good start, and a good connection. We also ... do a mixer with new staff with staff that have been hired in the last one, two, three years ... get the chance to meet some of the people that are newer to our district....good connection piece in smaller setting...focus on the staff development piece ... make sure they know that they can attend certain in-services or workshops that will help them. (Superintendent 6)

I don't do much, ... introduce myself ... welcome them, and at that time I tell them about how good a school district we have and we're glad to have them on board. (Superintendent 5)

Socialization and induction in rural districts vary. Two superintendents have staff orientation days with new staff members with various activities that end with the new staff in their new classrooms. One of these two superintendents along with their Board of education members try to develop connections and provide a socialization activity to acclimate any newly hired staff. One superintendent welcomes the newly hired staff and discusses why they are in a good district.

Retention was important for all interview participants:

Retention ... is about building the culture where people want to stay. [Sometimes it is] money and/or fringes... \$450 professional development per year to every teacher, and let them have some say on what they use that for. We really don't restrict it very much at all. Hotel room, conference expenses, travel... (Superintendent 1)

... it's up to me to keep a competitive salary. Competitive salary, competitive day package, length of contract, competitive benefits, retention bonuses to our staff if they return back to work in August... (Superintendent 3)

...first day back, that whole group in-service day we have done \$1,000 retention bonus for any staff member that came back to us that year...it's a huge plus and a huge retention piece for new staff ... they see that if you stay in here, do a good job, you are going to get rewarded ... (Superintendent 6)

... comes down to culture and feeling appreciated ... for us has to be more than dollars and cents... give staff some control... on calendar... less stringent on a workday or staff development day, or lunches...whatever it is, you have to make them feel appreciated, and have to make it a place where they want to work... (Superintendent 2)

...important for rural school superintendent to be in the buildings, talking with staff, asking how things are going... people must feel comfortable coming to you when they need something. (Superintendent 4)

My role in retention ...ensuring they are provided with what they need to teach and have resources... If they have the resources, they don't want to leave... we have the highest base salary in both our county and the neighboring county... providing resources ... is the biggest retention policy action I can take. (Superintendent 5)

Retention of teachers was another significant responsibility for the superintendents interviewed. Three superintendents felt that it was critical to be competitive financially and offer multiple opportunities for professional development. One of the rural districts had a significant retention bonus each year. Two superintendents felt that focusing on other things such as creating a culture of respect and collaboration created an environment where staff would stay in the rural district. One superintendent relayed that providing resources for teachers was the best retention policy he could make.

Recruitment and retention of all staff were two main themes that open and axial coding found in this category. According to interview respondents in how they answered the survey questions and interview questions it is becoming more difficult to recruit and retain teachers/principals in a highly competitive environment because of teacher/principal shortages. All participate in recruitment and recommend the provision of resources to retain what they consider to be high quality staff members. The involvement of superintendents in recruitment and retention is supported in research. Rural superintendents can affect the quality of the district by exerting control through recruitment and purposefully having more of an impact on hiring staff (Hallinger, 2003). Marzano and Waters (2009) suggested to have a strong instructional core then superintendents must be involved in selecting teachers and principals. Superintendents in this study utilized a variety of strategies to retain teachers in their districts. The greatest determining factor of why a teacher or principal stayed in a community was their rootedness to the community (Bornfield, 1997). Incentives were utilized such as differential pay, signing bonuses, school-loan forgiveness in order to retain teachers (Hammer, et. al., 2005).

Supervision and Evaluation

Table 4

Supervision and Evaluation, Responses to survey with Percent Essential (Prior and Now)

	Prior				Now			
Vision building with collaboration?	13	61	17	18.7	1	28	62	67.4
Planning and utilizing consensus?	13	60	18	19.8	1	43	47	51.1
Developing leadership capacity in principals/teachers?	12	62	17	18.7	0	20	71	77.2
Developing your own leadership capacity?	5	49	36	39.6	1	20	69	75.0
Empowering teachers/principals to be innovative risk takers?	20	54	17	18.7	0	26	65	70.7
Time spent as an instructional leader?	9	59	23	25.3	0	54	37	40.2
Time spent as a manager?	11	59	21	23.1	5	49	37	40.2
Average % Essential				23.4				60.2

Supervision and Evaluation (Table 4) are important responsibilities for the rural superintendents with an average percent increase of 36.9 percent of respondents answering *Essential*. Prior to becoming superintendents survey respondents prioritized *developing your own leadership capacity* (39.6 percent) and *Time spent as an instructional leader* (25.3 percent). After becoming a superintendent priorities change to *developing leadership capacity in teacher/principals* and *empowering teachers/principals to be innovative risk takers* at 77.2 percent and 70.7 percent respectively.

Several interview respondents indicated that they answered the survey responses in regards to developing leadership capacity in principals and teachers:

Life experience showed me that you must have leaders in other employees in order to building a successful school district. (Superintendent 1)

In a small town it is harder to get people to stay in your location. Would prefer to hire high quality over local but we do try to build our own staffs leadership capability in order to provide for quality. (Superintendent 3)

I realized the importance of this after I become a superintendent, good principals and leadership from staff members create a vision and culture that is a professional place for our staff and a great place to learn for our students. (Superintendent 4)

It goes back to the quality of education; the more you can lean on principals/teachers to be leaders not followers the more successful district you will have. (Superintendent 5)

In regards to empowering principals/teachers to be innovative and risk taking interview respondents answered regarding why they felt this was *Essential* on the survey:

I thought people were innovative and didn't know they would not be. I had to learn how to empower them become innovative. Not a lot of improvement takes place if you don't. (Superintendent 1)

My technology background brought this to the forefront and because of that it led to staff to take a risk to get out of their comfort zone. (Superintendent 3)

If you are satisfied with the same result, keep doing it the same way. We need people willing to change and take risks to increase student achievement. (Superintendent 5)

Interview participants answered questions regarding supervision and evaluation as well as questions regarding their own leadership styles. Their responses to supervision and evaluation were:

Supervision and evaluation are ... like a coaching role and being supportive. I enjoy ... evaluating, we talk ... roles and expectations and ... how we reach those goals. ... figure out the best way that I can support those goals ... evaluation is an important part of supervision ... you set your goals with your employees ... (Superintendent 4)

I always base my evaluation off of the goals that we've set together as administrators. The supervision part is ongoing through the year, continuing going back to the goals ... to make adjustments ... as the year progresses... (Superintendent 5)

...our goals and benchmarks that we have discussed as an administrative team. The superintendent ... interprets those to the principal's ... identify as an evaluation. I then help ... meet those benchmarks for evaluation. (Superintendent 3)

The only evaluations that I do now are of people that are in leadership roles....my evaluation technique and any meetings are geared on how to get better, what do you need to get better, and having those conversations. (Superintendent 1)

Put good people in the right places, let them do their job... when they have issues ... be here to support them... also correct them when they need corrected. Don't hover or micromanage. (Superintendent 2)

Supervision and evaluation should be more building based with support from the superintendent as needed. ... If ... a challenging situation or discussions that have to be made and dealt with... then I would be involved. (Superintendent 6)

Three participants stated that evaluation is an important part of supervision, which includes the setting of goals and expectations and is continual throughout the year. Two

participants supervise and evaluate the staffs that are direct reports to them. They provide support and correction when needed. One participant relies on the building principals for evaluation and only is involved in challenging situations.

Most participants talked about their leadership style and if it had changed from when they were first hired as a superintendent. Participants described:

The role of superintendent has changed my leadership style ... broader view. ... more reasoning for the bureaucracy that you understand at the district level You are pulled in more different directions. ... multiple buildings, plus a board, and a community, pulling you different directions. You have to have ... global perspective...Overall, I am ... more relaxed. Ideally I want to be ... more hands-off and less of a micromanager...at times I do micromanage.
(Superintendent 2)

Being a superintendent makes me ... look at things from a 30,000 foot elevation... (Superintendent 3)

I think it's ...listening.... not reacting as fast as you would as a building principal... allowed me to take a step back and look at the entire picture... at the whole community. (Superintendent 4)

Your leadership style has to meet the needs of the district. ... I have certain leadership styles for certain situations through consolidation and returning to a normal school district. Now I'm back to ... my original style ... which is ... a servant type of leader, and being a resource. (Superintendent 1)

The principal's job changed my attitude towards leadership ... confronted with two different styles of leadership from two different superintendents. One ... control of everything and one trusted his employees ... I wanted to be the type of superintendent that allowed my principals to do their job....I'm not going to tell them how to do it. (Superintendent 5)

Three superintendent participants indicated that a broader, more global perspective is needed to lead the district they are serving. One discussed that their leadership style had to meet the needs of the district. That style could change based upon what was needed by the district. One superintendent discussed that they emulated a mentor superintendent that allowed their principals to do their jobs.

Growth was the theme determined by coding of this category. Interview respondents indicated that not only growth of themselves professionally but growth of principals and teachers and encouraging that professional growth builds a high quality staff and district. Peterson (1999) noted that the keeper of the vision has to signal that professional growth is important. Vitcov and Bloom (2010) agree that supervision should be driven by the vision of the superintendent and principals as leaders of professional learning communities. Schools that plan for professional development and feedback from principals and teachers produce staff members that have confidence in the ability to succeed and will solicit feedback more frequently (Barkley, et.al., 2001).

Goals and Resource Allocation

Table 5

Goals and Resource Allocation Responses to survey with Percent Essential (Prior and Now)

	Prior				Now			
	<u>NI</u>	<u>I</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>%E</u>	<u>NI</u>	<u>I</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>%E</u>
Consensus building with staff and community?	7	76	8	8.8	1	45	45	48.9
Creation of a strategic plan?	21	64	6	6.6	1	38	54	60.9
Development of action plan to follow the strategic plan?	17	65	8	8.8	1	33	56	59.8
Revisiting and revising the strategic plan?	21	60	10	11.0	1	35	55	55
Average % Essential				8.8				56.1

Table 5 displays the category of Goals and Resource Allocation, which increased in *Essential* answers from superintendents averaging from 8.8 percent prior to become superintendents to 57.1 percent after (Table 5). *Creation of a strategic plan* and the *development of a strategic plan*, as wells as, *revisiting and revising the strategic plan* all showed significant increase in *Essential* answers after respondents became superintendents.

Interview respondents indicated that they did not take strategic planning seriously before becoming superintendents when answering the survey:

I didn't realize how important strategic planning was as a principal. If you don't think about the future then all you have is the daily grind, we must continually looking to improve. (Superintendent 1)

As a teacher or director I was not aware of the strategic plan.
(Superintendent 3)

I laughed about this as a building principal and did not take this serious.
(Superintendent 4)

Strategic planning wasn't done when I started as a superintendent many years ago. (Superintendent 5)

After becoming superintendents interview respondents indicated they answered the survey showing an importance of strategic planning and why it is important:

Without the strategic plan, the district can have no direction. We create several small steps towards accomplishing a much larger goal. By doing so, we keep the district stakeholders focused on the goals of the district. (Superintendent 2)

We develop and revisit the strategic plan each year, reflecting on the past year and then looking toward the future. (Superintendent 3)

Now as a superintendent, after we created a strategic plan we utilize to measure our success. This is what I refer to while talking to parents, staff, and the community. (Superintendent 4)

We revisit our plan every month to ensure transparency and fidelity to our strategic plan. (Superintendent 5)

Interview respondents also indicated the importance of utilizing collaboration while developing the strategic plan:

When you are a principal you are worried about your building, but once I became a superintendent then I had to start looking at the whole system and how

everything relates. It is now important to work and collaborate with all stakeholders to develop the districts vision. (Superintendent 4)

With all the emphasis being place on research based strategies and student testing you have to make sure that all stakeholders are buying into your whole program. (Superintendent 5)

Consensus building and collaboration occurs with our board and administrators/directors and then extends to stakeholders on the importance of our projects. We share facts and information so stakeholders know what we are doing. They may not agree 100%, but they understand our reasoning behind each decision. (Superintendent 6)

When asked what the superintendent's role in the developing the vision and goals of the district interview participants responded:

I think it is to lead. By leading it sets up the process of how you are going to get input from ... stakeholders, constituents, staff, community, and business and what it looks like....I've learned something ... leading is ensuring we don't get into an area we really don't want to be... (Superintendent 1)

... listening to what your board wants... what people in your community want. The mission or vision shouldn't be just mine, it should be what the town and our district wants. So you have to listen to what they say and bring that back and try to massage it and make it a complete thing based off what the community wants. (Superintendent 4)

... if the superintendent doesn't do it, it's not going to get done... they had goals...what was in place had run its course... time for a rebranding, and we did that process...adopted our new goals or focus points. The board has to hold the superintendent to that ... you get pulled a lot of different ways. Without that focus and being up front, it is real easy to move away from that... (Superintendent 2)

I have a leadership role... shared with the board, administrators, and directors. We are not a redesign district but want to go in that direction. ... administrators and directors ... communicate to staff ... to ensure that we are going in that direction (redesign)...they need to lead the charge ... to change the way we do business because of the importance of ever-changing public school scenarios. (Superintendent 6)

We have outside agencies ...work with building goals. I am more of a cheerleader ... with the Board...display our weaknesses. Know our weaknesses but also ... our strengths ... utilizing these ... we set goals. I am more of a facilitator to set goals and bringing stakeholders together to set the goals. (Superintendent 3)

Two superintendents responded that they must have a role in the development of the vision and goals of their districts. Their roles are to seek input and listen to what their respective communities and stakeholders want for the district. Two participants believe that they must have leadership roles along with the board of education in ensuring that the district is communicating the vision and goals of the district. They as superintendent must be focused and lead in the goal setting for their districts. One superintendent acts as a facilitator in bringing stakeholders together to set the vision of the district.

When asked to describe the process that they went through to develop a vision and goals in their district, participants had similar responses including a few with a commitment to a board retreat which was asked in another category and showed only an 8.7 percent increase.

Participants stated:

That first year ... just listening to community, getting a feel for how things were, listening a lot, and being out there. It was important because one of the main things ... was re-garnishing community support. We brought in ... community members... those fence climbers...those skeptics... KASB led us through the strategic planning process. Then it was a matter making sure that the wording was good enough for that everyday person, in which if somebody picks it up and looks at it they can say they can get behind it...(Superintendent 2)

... district leadership team is made up of some community and business members, staff members and a Board member. That group and whole Board looks at the overall district goals and visions ... sets those based on the pieces of the puzzle. ... MAP tests by grade level, socio-economic data, and the Communities That Care Survey. We base our goals through that information... (Superintendent 3)

...community meeting with KASB ... in a 4-5 hour work session... open to all community members, but some we invited through personalized letter ... We listed our goals and developed what we wanted from a person that graduates from our district. (Superintendent 4)

For us it starts at two different levels. It starts with the board having some conversations through retreats. Five years from now, what do we want to have accomplished? ... at the same time the administrators in the district are having conversations about what do you need specifically for your building? Where do we want to be? Where do we want our students to be? ... representation from

those that are heavily involved in schools and ... those that are not connected to the school. ... be very intentional on people who get put onto our strategic plan committee. We have five communities and getting somebody from each community, but then also some other sub-groups of the community...(Superintendent 1)

...developing a vision and goals is very important. ... some sort of retreat or supper for the board and administrators. We have sat down and talked about their goals for the upcoming school year. This year in particular, the board members set three goals and they instructed that they wanted administrative reports in those three goals every quarter. (Superintendent 5)

Developing a plan is very much shared leadership. ... basic things...if it's going to help teachers teach, students learn... help improve the overall educational experience, we're going to try to find a way to do it.everybody feels like they've got an investment in this thing called 'school' and in how things move forward. (Superintendent 6)

Three participants related that outside agencies such as the Kansas Association of School Boards (KASB) were part of the process of developing the vision and goals of the district. Groups of individuals from the communities in the district as well as studying current data were also part of the process. Two participants specifically mentioned board retreats although one district involved community members while the other district selected goals that were priorities of the board of education. One participant replied that developing the vision and goals of the district is very much shared leadership in order to foster investment in the goals and vision of the district.

Goals and stakeholder involvement were two key codes that were derived from this sections. Goals were not *Essential* to interview respondents in how they answered their survey questions prior to becoming superintendents. After becoming superintendents, respondents indicated that utilizing stakeholder's opinions was important in developing and maintaining the strategic plan. Marzano and Waters (2009) support the idea of stakeholder input for districts to reach their improvement goals. Stakeholders should consist of but not limited to superintendent,

school board members, principals, teachers, students, and member of the community. Ward (2007) agrees on the importance of engaging all stakeholders in the goal setting process. Green and Etheridge (2001) found that for meaningful change to occur in schools, district leaders must work with all stakeholders to achieve success. Continued revisiting of the strategic plan and their action plan provides fidelity and transparency to the goals of the school district respondents represented and provides justification for past actions and provides criteria for the evaluation of performance, participants and programs of actions within districts (Scott, 2003).

Board of Education/Superintendent Relationship

Table 6

Board of Education/Superintendent Relationship Responses to survey with Percent Essential (Prior and Now)

	<u>Prior</u>				<u>Now</u>			
	<u>NI</u>	<u>I</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>%E</u>	<u>NI</u>	<u>I</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>%E</u>
Building mutual trust?	5	62	24	26.4	0	5	86	93.5
Fostering a commitment to continuous improvement?	4	67	20	22	0	15	76	82.6
Time spent on interpersonal communication with the BOE?	16	67	8	8.8	0	22	69	75
Commitment to an annual BOE/Superintendent retreat?	50	40	1	1.1	27	55	9	9.8
Average % Essential				14.3				67.6

Table 6 shows the responses from superintendents in the area of Board of Education/Superintendent Relationship, from the most common Essential item to the least common. *Building mutual trust* has the highest priority prior to becoming a superintendent and scored the highest at 93.5 percent *Essential* followed by *fostering a commitment to continuous improvement* (82.6 percent), *time spent on BOE/Superintendent relationship* (77.2 percent), and *time spent on interpersonal communication with the Board of education* (75 percent). *Commitment to an annual board retreat* only scored an 8.7 percent increase.

Interview respondents indicated their survey answers prior to becoming superintendents were centered on building trust with board members:

Without trust you will be always second guessing each other.
(Superintendent 2)

The board is not the day-to-day managers of the school district. They must trust the administration to make decisions on a daily basis. (Superintendent 3)

Prior to being hired I felt the board need to see you as a person that they can respect and trust. This allows them to become comfortable that the district is in good hands. Knowing this, the continual building of trust is ongoing and is influenced as much by your actions as your words. (Superintendent 6)

After becoming superintendents, interview respondents indicated why they marked *Essential* on the survey on *building mutual trust, time spent on building the board of education/superintendent relationship* and *communicating to the board of education*:

Remaining on the same page with your board allows for the district to continue in the right direction. It helps to know the individual interests of the board which helps you in guiding the board members in the same direction.
(Superintendent 2)

Prior to becoming a superintendent, the board would ask questions and I answered them but I worked for the superintendent. Now as a superintendent, I am cognizant of having those relationships built with board members so that when the hard decisions are made regarding one of their wives or children you have built a strong foundation of trust with them. Communication is key in working with the board of education. (Superintendent 4)

I spend a lot of time on this relationship. I communicate each week about what is happening in the district. I meet with individual board members as needed to discuss different topics. I rely on them a lot as they have long-standing ties to the community. It is important to listen to them. I visit with them and get to know them when I see them out in the community. Board members need to see you as a person that they can respect and trust. (Superintendent 6)

Interview participants during interviews agreed that communication was essential as well as to build mutual trust between the board and superintendent. To some including a board retreat was essential. Participant responses were:

Communication is a big part of it. They want me to lead and make decisions. Their role is to make sure that where we're headed aligns with what they hear from constituents. My role... balancing listening to the professionals ...where they want to go and what we think is best and ...matching up with where the board wants to go. To me that's the relationship you got to have with the board. They're not experts in trends and research you've got to tell them why it's good, especially when you're going away from the traditional. I do a lot of educating of the board... making sure we're all on the same page and have kids at the focus... (Superintendent 1)

...how to properly deal with situations that come to them, what situations to forward on, where to direct things, as well as communicating things that are coming up, and things that are happening at all levels. ...being only in this small community for a short period of time, there is history in things that I need input on them from. ... more difficult to make change in a rural school, and if you don't have that background and history, it's going to doom you... (Superintendent 2)

Have a board retreat in place. I try to keep the board overly informed. Type an email once a week every Friday...so they are prepared. It helps board meetings go very well and smooth. There are times where I do meet with board members individually. (Superintendent 6)

...pushing this summer for some type of retreat. My board is trusting. I keep them informed of what's going on. I'm making sure they're aware of what might happen and know the repercussions one way or the other. When the superintendent and administration does everything right in a situation, I think that makes the bond between the board and superintendent even tighter...(Superintendent 3)

Being open and honest with each other. You have to be able to trust each other and listen to each other. Open up the communication... (Superintendent 4)

...foster a relationship with the board by showing I respect their ideas and will listen to them. I've always tried to be a good listener, and give my input when they ask for it, and always be available to have a conversation. I'm very open about the finances and how we are spending the money.... (Superintendent 5)

Communication and mutual trust were common themes in the Board of education/superintendent relationship. Three participants spoke of why communication with the Board of education was essential. Board of education members are from the rural community and can provide valuable input to superintendents. Three participants spoke of building mutual trust to build a bond between the superintendent and Board of education.

When asked what aspects or issues were keeping them away from the ideal board/superintendent relationship participant answers were:

As you get new members on, getting through the perception of what a board members job is. Almost every new board member that comes on has some agendas that got them to run. They are not necessarily negative agendas, but they don't understand they may not have the whole picture of what's going on. (Superintendent 1)

You have a lot of relatives of board members. I have a former district administrator and a former district teacher on my board... They have a great perspective, but for them I think that may haze sometimes... I talk often with my board about being neutral. When we are faced with a decision, we have to ... look at it neutrally, and when you have relations, good friends or past experience, it makes it difficult...(Superintendent 2)

Small-town politics. In a rural setting, people are related to each other. We might have boards that have people that work within the same buildings are related to each other. Husbands, wives, aunts, uncles, moms, and dads. They've all grown up with each other. I'm the outsider trying to fit in ... (Superintendent 4)

...always going to have issues ... that are administrative decisions ... not board decisions, things that do not deal with policy and expenditures. Ideally ... a board ...concerned with policy and was actually doing the mechanism of providing for the resources for students and teachers, and not in the weeds on how things are done. (Superintendent 5)

Participants answered that there were many obstacles to reaching the ideal relationship between the superintendent and Board of education. These range from having to indoctrinate new Board members with agendas, having relatives of staff members on the Board of education, small-town politics, and the Board of education becoming involved with what are considered administrative issues.

One interview participant replied that fostering relationships with the board was important particularly if it was not school related:

In the past, I was able to foster a little bit of my relationship by the board in how I treated my board members. At conventions with the board...I made sure I catered to them. If they wanted to be driven to the shopping mall, I drove them

to the shopping mall; I catered to them at supper. I fostered a really good relationship with those board members. (Superintendent 5)

Two major themes stood out in the board of education/superintendent relationship. The first is trust. Trust is built from hiring and must be maintained while serving as the superintendent. The trust between the superintendent and the board of education is the glue that guides the district into the future. The second theme is communication. It is essentially important to communicate as superintendent to the board of education on a continual basis. This increases transparency and trust between the two parties on a continual basis. A review of the literature supports the findings in this category. Trust and communication are essential to the board of education/superintendent relationship. Kowalski (2006) established that perhaps no relationship has a bigger impact on the education of children than the relationship between the board and its superintendent. Hutshell (2009) found that there should be a clear line of communication and a trusting relationship between the board and superintendent. Chalker (1999) also determined that communication, interpersonal relationships and human relations were critical as well in the board of education/superintendent relationship.

Understanding the Community

Although important to rural superintendents, as viewed in Table 7, Understanding the Community scored lowest of the categories of a rural superintendents responsibility. Superintendent perceptions showed an average of percent *Essential* answers at 55 percent. Prior to becoming superintendents survey respondents prioritized *visibility in the community* and *participation in school initiated events* as most *Essential* at 47.3 percent and 37.4 percent respectively.

Table 7

Understanding the Community Responses to survey with Percent Essential (Prior and Now)

	Prior				Now			
	<u>NI</u>	<u>I</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>%E</u>	<u>NI</u>	<u>I</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>%E</u>
Informing the community through the district newsletter?	24	58	8	8.8	11	62	17	18.5
Informing the community through social media?	31	54	6	6.6	1	39	51	55.4
Participation in school initiated events?	3	54	34	37.4	0	33	58	63
Participation in community groups?	7	69	15	16.5	2	39	50	54.3
Visibility in the community?	2	45	43	47.3	0	12	78	84.8
Average				23.3				55.2

After becoming superintendents continued to prioritize *visibility in the community* (84.8 percent) and participation in school initiated events (63 percent) followed by *informing the community through social media* (55.4 percent) and *participation in community events* (54.2 percent).

Interview participants when asked why they indicated on the survey prior to becoming a superintendent that visibility would be *Essential* to their new positions as superintendent:

I felt that prior to becoming a superintendent that it would be important for the superintendent to be involved in the school activities through attendance and involved in the community through various community groups in order to tell the story of the district. (Superintendent 1)

School is a big deal in a rural community. This is their school. It is important from the beginning in my tenure as a superintendent to be visible for the good of the school district. (Superintendent 3)

After becoming superintendents, interview respondents indicated that visibility in community and participation in school and community events were *Essential*:

As superintendent you are the face of the district. Having those school-to-business connections allow you to tell the districts story. (Superintendent 1)

Being in a small community and school system, it is even more important to be visible. Not only visible and present but you must be involved. To do so

creates understanding of your community this allows you to lead the district more effectively. (Superintendent 2)

I want the community to know that there is more to me than just the school. I want to give back to the community that has treated me well. (Superintendent 3)

As the superintendent you are one of the higher paid members of the community. It is essential to be visible in the district and community. This builds trust and accountability with district patrons. (Superintendent 4)

I am expected to be at as many school events at all levels that I can. This is very important for me to build community trust and talk to people in an informal environment. I really enjoy this part of my job. I also attend community events to show support for their causes. The connection that the school has in so many towns is vital to the success of the community. (Superintendent 6)

Informing the community through social media was Essential to interview respondents when completing the survey:

More people rely on social media for information than most other outlets, so using this medium is important. (Superintendent 2)

Social media has taken over the communication piece for the district....we are reaching a whole different audience, but it is the audience we are trying to reach in regards to the district and the kids we teach. We communicate more effectively, efficiently and it is a way to get our school brand out there so community members can see what our school is about. (Superintendent 4)

Social media is huge in the age of immediate information. (Superintendent 6)

Interview participants agreed with the survey results that the superintendent should be visible in the local communities. They stated:

I think in rural communities it's ... a necessity to be involved. I know from my own personal experience, for me, it's how I know what's going on in the community and what the community expectations are of the school. I'm the current chamber president and before I was a member of the chamber board. I am a member of the board for the local cable access channel and other non-profit organizations. Being on these boards helps me to tell the story of the district...you need to be active. We have a lot of communities ... being active is important. (Superintendent 1)

My involvement comes from my kids in school. I coached flag football ...going to church locally is important... seeing kids at Walmart on a Saturday, or going to the gas station on Sunday or being at the youth ball fields. People seeing you as not just the person who runs the school, but more as a person that cares about the community is essential ...ultimately trying to garner their support for the district ... they have to believe that you believe in the school system...(Superintendent 2)

It's important for people to see you out and see that you're invested within the community. Also, you need to learn what people are wanting and what people like. Starting this month we are starting a chat at the district office to talk about issues within the schools, positives and negatives going on...I am involved in a lot of community events. (Superintendent 4)

My kids went to schools where I was the administrator and they were involved in activities and athletics. Every Friday morning the local church had a breakfast ... I went down to the service station or Casey's and ... visited with the crowd there. I go to the local newspaper office four or five times per year especially at budget time and have good conversations. (Superintendent 5)

I may be old school, but I think the superintendent should live in their community, shop in their community. Anytime there is a community event, I get involved. I sat in 40-degree weather in a dunk tank at a yearly celebration. I play in the pep band at ballgames. It's a lot of fun to get in with the kids and they enjoy me doing it. Because I've lived here all my life after college, those connections are very vital...I feel strongly that they should be living in the community. (Superintendent 3)

It's important to be seen out at community events, school events, and fundraisers. ...important that you're involved in the local community and different service organizations. I'm a member of the Rotary and meet with our Ministerial Alliance. I also write an article monthly in the newspaper. (Superintendent 6)

Participants answered that it was important to be involved in the rural community as superintendent. Activities varied from serving in local organizations, being involved in school and community activities, attending church, and visiting with community members. Two participants felt strongly that it was important to live in the community in which you are a superintendent. One is beginning to write a monthly article in the local newspaper.

Superintendent participants reported the following:

It's hard ... to look at other jobs ... I'm in the ideal role, that I love. I'm involved with ... daily operational stuff as I want to be... I'm more involved in leading our district to continuing to get better, that's what I want.... we're small, but not real small...if you're a really small district, in that you're so much in the daily operational stuff you don't have time to lead the change I feel like where I'm at, it allows me to have the best of both worlds, and do a little bit of both. I think you can really focus on just being the lead on change, and focus on growth... (Superintendent 1)

They knew they must earn the trust of the community:

...early on in the superintendent scene in a rural small system... there is a huge amount of skepticism amongst community members...that you're not just making a stepping stone to a larger district... invested in that community. I had an awkward situation where a larger neighboring district superintendent retired recently ... bombarded with questions from both that school district and ours. Are you going to apply? ...it was not right for my family...I think that garnered some solidification ... we're vested here and hopefully support will come from that. (Superintendent 2)

And, they were enjoying the experience of being a rural superintendent:

It's fun. ..It really is. The best part... is seeing kids do things that they enjoyed doing ... they like coming to school ... they keep growing. Talking to them after they graduate ... during their college breaks ... hearing about what they're doing ... It pays off. It is all worth it...(Superintendent 4)

They're enjoyable, just due to the fact that you can know everybody in the community. (Superintendent 5)

Trust is the major theme found from the responses in this category. Specifically trust is enhanced by visibility of the superintendent in the community and communicating to stakeholders in the district. Because the rural superintendent attends and participates in school and community events, the rural community that may have been skeptical of rural superintendent in the beginning of their tenure, begins to trust the superintendent and the direction the district is headed. This is supported in literature. Fiore (2000) found that it is the choice of the school leader to be visible that promotes a positive culture with the school community. Although

visibility can place a superintendent in the public's eye in rural schools, it can also be a positive contributor to the school culture (Jenkins, 2007). This in turn develops trust. Visibility is a key component to building coalitions and trust with all stakeholders for overcoming future challenges (Farmer, 2009; Kowalski, 2006).

The summary of the results are based upon the five areas that a superintendent would operate in. In selection, socialization, and retention, interviewing for principals was essential for rural superintendents, followed by time spent on recruitment of teachers/principals. Participants indicated that they recruit based upon the image of the district and participate in the hiring process. Socialization practices include orientation days and socialization activities to acclimate the new hire into the district. Retention includes offering competitive salaries and benefits, including bonuses, providing resources, and creating a culture of respect and collaboration where staff would want to stay in the rural district.

Developing leadership capacity in teachers/principals scored highest in supervision and evaluation. Interview participants noted that evaluation is an important piece of supervision which included setting goals and expectations and monitoring continually throughout the year. Support and correction are offered when needed. Most interview participants indicated that their leadership style had changed since they became a superintendent in that they needed a broader, more global perspective to lead the district. That style could change based upon the needs of the district at a particular time.

Creation of a strategic plan and development of the action plan to guide it were important to rural superintendents when discussing goals and resource allocation. Superintendents seek input from their communities and stakeholders about the needs of the district. They must have leadership roles along with the board of education and must communicate the districts vision and

goals. Outside agencies were helpful as part of the process of developing goals and a few felt that board retreats were beneficial in focusing the board of education and superintendent on the districts vision and goals.

Time spent on interpersonal communication and building mutual trust scored highest in cultivating the board of education/superintendent relationship. Communication was important because board of education members are from the rural community and can provide valuable input to superintendents. Building mutual trust develops a bond between the superintendent and board of education. Obstacles to communication and building mutual trust are new board of education members with specific agendas, having Board members that are relatives of staff, small-town politics and the Board becoming too involved in administrative issues.

Participation and involvement in the local community was essential for rural superintendents, although communication to the community via social media scored the highest. Superintendents responded that they served in local organizations, were involved in both school and local activities, attended church, and visited with community members. A few felt that it was essential to live in the district they served. Rural superintendents reported that they loved their jobs and felt they were in their ideal position and school district. They earned the trust of their communities and were enjoying serving their rural communities.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Implications

This study explored how Kansas rural superintendents' identify their priorities before accepting their first superintendency compared to how they actually prioritize these responsibilities once becoming a superintendent. Prior research from Murphy et al. (1986) in mostly urban settings described the roles and responsibilities of the superintendent in nine control areas of: selection, socialization, supervision, evaluation, rewards/sanctions, goals, resource allocation, behavior, and technological specifications. Other researchers described the roles and responsibilities of the superintendent as: superintendent/school board relationships; leadership; resource management; human resource management; and community leadership (Kowalski, 2006). This study was based upon and organized into a conceptual framework for understanding the behaviors and perceptions of superintendents and their priorities of their responsibilities as the chief administrator in a rural Kansas school district. That conceptual framework consists of five sections which are: selection, socialization, and monitoring behavior control; supervision and evaluation; goals and resource allocation; board of education/superintendent relationship; and, understanding the community. This study's research questions are:

- (1) In an ideal situation, looking back to when they were first hired as a superintendent, how do superintendents describe the priority of their responsibilities upon accepting their first superintendency?
- (2) Having served as a superintendent in a rural community, how do they actually prioritize the importance of these responsibilities?
- (3) How have their priorities evolved having actually served as a rural superintendent?

This chapter will discuss the findings and derive potential conclusions from survey responses, how interview respondents described answering the survey and interview responses, review limitations of the research, as well as address future research possibilities in the study of rural superintendents.

Table 8

Responses to survey with Percent Essential (Prior and Now)

	Prior				Now			
	NI	I	E	%E	NI	I	E	%E
<u>Selection, Socialization, and Monitoring</u>								
Time spent on recruitment of teachers/principals?	5	62	24	26.4	1	24	66	71.7
Developing procedures to hire teachers/principals?	19	58	14	15.4	1	39	51	55.4
Characteristics of teachers/principals?	9	56	26	28.6	0	25	66	71.7
Interviewing for teachers?	5	47	38	41.8	3	40	47	51.1
Interviewing for principals?	8	51	32	35.2	0	10	81	88
Acclimate and retain staff members?	15	62	14	15.4	1	39	52	56.5
<u>Supervision and Evaluation</u>								
Vision building with collaboration?	13	61	17	18.7	1	28	62	67.4
Planning and utilizing consensus?	13	60	18	19.8	1	43	47	51.1
Developing leadership capacity in principals/teachers?	12	62	17	18.7	0	20	71	77.2
Developing your own leadership capacity?	5	49	36	39.6	1	20	69	75
Empowering teachers/principals to be innovative risk takers?	20	54	17	18.7	0	26	65	70.7
Time spent as an instructional leader?	9	59	23	25.3	0	54	37	40.2
Time spent as a manager?	11	59	21	23.1	5	49	37	40.2
<u>Board of Education/Superintendent Relationship</u>								
Time spent building BOE/Superintendent Relationship?	21	58	12	13.2	0	20	71	77.2
Time spent on interpersonal communication with the BOE?	16	67	8	8.8	0	22	69	75
Building mutual trust?	5	62	24	26.4	0	5	86	93.5
Fostering a commitment to continuous improvement?	4	67	20	22	0	15	76	82.6
Commitment to an annual BOE/Superintendent retreat?	50	40	1	1.1	27	55	9	9.8
<u>Goals and Resource Allocation</u>								
Consensus building with staff and community?	7	76	8	8.8	1	45	45	48.9
Creation of a strategic plan?	21	64	6	6.6	1	38	54	58.7
Development of action plan to follow the strategic plan?	17	65	8	8.8	1	33	56	60.9
Revisiting and revising the strategic plan?	21	60	10	11	1	35	55	59.8
<u>Understanding the Community</u>								
Informing the community through the district newsletter?	24	58	8	8.8	11	62	17	18.5
Informing the community through social media?	31	54	6	6.6	1	39	51	55.4
Participation in school initiated events?	3	54	34	37.4	0	33	58	63
Participation in community groups?	7	69	15	16.5	2	39	50	54.3
Visibility in the community?	2	45	43	47.3	0	12	78	84.8

Discussion

The discussion describes the inferential reasoning of the researcher in why the quantitative data obtained from the survey results, specifically “why” was there an increase in percent Essential answers from respondents before they became superintendents (Prior) and currently as superintendents (Now). Table 8 shows all survey respondents answers in response to the survey questions.

Selection, Socialization, and Monitoring. Hallinger (2003) found that superintendents can affect the quality of a district and its focus on curriculum and instruction by exerting control over the selection and hiring, through recruitment and purposely having more of an impact on hiring staff. Prior to becoming superintendents the newly appointed superintendent may not see the importance of exerting control of the recruitment and hiring process. Prior to becoming superintendents, survey respondents indicated that interviewing for teachers was *Essential* (41.8 percent) followed by interviewing for principals (35.2 percent). As a new superintendent the importance is placed higher on hiring teachers than principals because of their most recent experience as a principal. They have not, as of yet, been placed in a position as a superintendent to experience the practices of recruitment and hiring.

After becoming a superintendent, respondents indicated that they considered interviewing for principals as the most *Essential* (88 percent), although time spent on recruitment of principals and characteristics of teachers/principals followed at 71.7 percent. Having now gained experience at the superintendent level, survey responses agree with Hallinger’s research in that experienced superintendents would prefer to exert control over the selection and hiring process as well as supporting G. Peterson and Barnett’s (2005) contention that superintendents must recruit and retain highly qualified teachers and principals. Superintendents exert the

control to hire highly qualified teachers and principals in order to positively influence the learning outcomes of K-12 students and raise student achievement in their districts.

Recruitment and retention were the major themes discovered in this category of selection, socialization and monitoring. Responses to surveys derived from interviewed superintendents found that recruitment was a high priority because of teacher shortages and the lack of quality candidates. Many respondents because of their inexperience as a superintendent prior to taking a position did not realize that recruitment of principals/teachers would be such a high priority. Specifically the hiring of principals was viewed as a priority because they are the most important hire for the building they will serve. Like teachers, you must have the right person in the position to have such an impact on student success. Although some superintendents did not participate in recruitment they all valued it as a tool to gain high quality candidates. Many superintendents participated in job fairs, leadership academies and other organizations that brought them into contact with high quality candidates. Once high quality candidates were identified, rural superintendents pursued high quality candidates for hire and enticed them to stay in their district and community. Retention or retaining staff members was a high priority for this study's participants because they wanted to retain high-quality staff. They did so through a variety of techniques including higher salary, retention bonuses, and professional development incentives. Visibility and trust of the superintendent were also described to be important because staff must feel comfortable in approaching the superintendent if in need of resources. Participants also had to *sell* prospective new teachers on the location of the school and the benefit of living and working in their rural community. This study's findings are consistent with the conclusions of G. Petersen and Barnett (2005) who contend that school districts should

recruit and retain highly qualified teachers in all classrooms, no matter their relationship or connection with the local community.

Supervision and Evaluation. Growth was the theme determined by coding in supervision and evaluation. According to superintendent, respondents' growth not only in themselves but in principals and teachers was essential in having a high quality rural school district. In reviewing the literature, Oliva and Pawlas (2004) found that supervision provides a means of offering specialized help in improving instruction in a collegial, collaborative, and professional setting. Evaluation is the control the superintendent exerts over the content and process of personnel evaluation. Prior to becoming superintendents, survey respondents indicated that developing their own leadership capacity was the priority. Vitcov and Bloom (2010) suggest that principal leadership is second only to teacher quality in improving skills. Superintendents should help principals grow their leadership capacities. If done correctly, then prior to becoming superintendents then they would consider their own leadership capacity as the most important priority. Once they become superintendent Vitcov and Bloom (2010) support the findings of the survey responses that indicate that the priority shifts to developing leadership capacity of principals. Developing leadership capacity of principals/teachers was considered the higher priority after becoming a superintendent. Vitcov and Bloom (2010) suggested making principal supervision a primary responsibility and indicate that superintendents receive training in the supervision process. They should also have ongoing practices for professional development and reflection to improve their own leadership practices. Another method is to increase their presence in the classroom. Peterson's (1999) study supports this because it accomplishes three things: 1) demonstration of teacher support; 2) monitoring of classroom instruction; and 3) gaining a first-hand account at the site. The presence of the superintendent

shows support for principals and teachers and what they are trying to accomplish. Cuttress, Fullan, and Kilcher (2005) noted that building leadership capacity in principals/teachers and developing a culture centered on learning are key variables that support organizational change. Interview respondents viewed their leadership styles in varying degrees as more-relaxed, taking on a global perspective, allowing principals to do their job, and meeting the needs of the district. Oliva and Pawlas (2004) observations on supervision and evaluation were observed when superintendents responded that it was important which included setting goals which are reviewed continually throughout the year.

Goals and Resource Allocation. Goals and stakeholder involvement were two themes determined in the goals and resource allocation category. Marzano and Waters (2009) found that superintendents should establish and support effective goals (strategic plan) that include all members of the school district team. This team should include but not be limited to the superintendent, school board members, principals, teachers, students, and members of the community. Ward (2007) agrees with the importance of engaging these stakeholders in the vision and goal setting process. Jacobsen (1988) and Waters and Marzano (2006) emphasize the importance of superintendent establishing district goals for the purpose of improving schools. Creation of a strategic plan and the development of an action plan to follow the strategic plan increased the most in the *Essential* answers of survey respondents. These results indicate developing goals (strategic plan) and articulating the vision of the district is one of the primary job responsibilities of a superintendent. Marzano and Waters (2006) found that goals or development of the strategic plan focus the attention of the district on improvement of schools and provides the superintendent with the rationale and justification for their actions and direction as motivation of others in the district. Collaborative goal setting is the vehicle by districts to

reach their improvement goals. This creates an atmosphere of creative problem solving regarding improvement and should include all appropriate member of the school district team to include the superintendent, principals, school board members, teachers, students, and stakeholders in the community (Marzano and Waters, 2009). Superintendents should take the lead in strategic planning.

Superintendents should be interested in results oriented goals such as SMART goals while developing an action plan for the strategic plan (O'Neill, 2000). Goals should be informed by data about how students currently perform. Realistic and challenging targets should be set to lead to the ideal behavior change for individual teachers and administrators. Collaboration among teachers is essential to seeking new ways to improve instruction. Continued reflection of practice could be an outcome of these behavioral changes (O'Neill, 2000).

Superintendents must engage with principals by defining accountability measures based upon SMART goals and hold them to high expectations. Dana & Splatt (2013) concluded that superintendents that collaborated with principals in setting goals, who are involved in curricular, instructional, and assessment progress, who monitor progress and support principals with professional development and resources have a measurable impact on student learning. Superintendents must set high expectations and hold principals and teachers accountable for the improvement in their respective schools.

Interview respondents in response to the survey and the interview questions determined that superintendents should take the lead in strategic planning of the district. They do so by involving all district stakeholders in the process. Some districts use outside facilitators but others gather evidence from administrative teams and stakeholder teams. Once the plan is

developed respondents revisited the strategic plan on a periodic basis to ensure compliance, fidelity, and transparency to the goals of the district.

Board of Education/Superintendent Relationship. Trust and communication are essential themes determined in the board of education/superintendent relationship. Prior to taking their first position as superintendents, most rural superintendents were building principals. They may see the relationship with the board of education as adversarial due to their lack of familiarity with the board of education and the fact they report only to the superintendent. Their trust and communication is with the superintendent not the board of education. This would support why the survey respondents rated time spent building the board of education/superintendent relationship and time spent on interpersonal communication with the board of education lower than building mutual trust prior to becoming a superintendent. After becoming superintendents, survey respondents answered that building mutual trust showed the most increase in *Essential* answers followed closely by the aforementioned other two areas. This is confirmed by Kowalski's (2006) determination that no relationship in the school district has a bigger impact on the education of children than the relationship between the board of education and the superintendent. Tift (1990) found that the establishment of trust based upon mutual respect and a clear understanding of each other's roles, responsibilities, and expectations is the basis of this relationship. Chalker (1999), Kowalski (2006), and Tift (1990) suggest that communication between the board of education and superintendent is the most important issue at the heart of an effective working relationship between the two. There should be a clear line of communication and a trusting relationship between the board and superintendent (Hutsell, 2009).

Initial trust is gained in the hiring of a new superintendent. Through communication and continued nurturing of the board of education/superintendent a higher form of mutual trust is

built between the board and its superintendent. Communication increase the transparency and trust between both parties and leads to an effective working relationship between the two which further leads to the district reaching and attaining its goals.

Understanding the Community. Trust is also a theme found in the category of understanding the community. Through visibility in the school and community and communicating to district stakeholders. Visibility in the school community showed one the highest increase in *Essential* answers. Informing the community through social media scored the highest in percent essential increase due to the fact that social media may not have been available during the period prior to becoming a superintendent. Superintendents in rural school districts are continually in the spotlight and exposed to the public. Although this may place them in the spotlight in rural schools it is also a positive contributor to the school culture (Jenkins, 2007). In effect, rural superintendents are building trust in their decision making and actions by becoming more visible in the community and at school events. This is also a form of communication which is critical to building trust in the community. Participation in community groups and visibility in the community were also high in *Essential* answers on the survey. It is important for the superintendent to be visible. Fiore (2000) found it the choice of the school superintendent to be visible that promotes a positive culture with the school community. Participating in local service clubs, city or county boards, and attending public functions broaden the superintendent's knowledge of the community's needs, sentiments, and social information which is critical for developing support for the districts vision (Kowalski, 2006). Farmer (2009) and Kowalski (2006) both support the premise of collaboration with all stakeholders in the decision making process which in turn builds coalitions for overcoming future challenges. Being visible in the community is important to building trust for rural superintendents to start building those

coalitions. Interview respondents indicated that being visible was important to show an investment in the community and builds accountability for the school district. It is vital to the success of the rural community if the superintendent of the rural district is building connections to the community by remaining visible and accessible.

The purpose of this study was to describe the perceptions of superintendents in rural schools of how they should prioritize their responsibilities upon accepting their first superintendency compared to how they are actually prioritizing those responsibilities now, and how those priorities have evolved having actually served as a rural superintendent.

Rural Kansas superintendents want to recruit and retain quality candidates and then entice them to stay in their district. Recruitment of staff members was important because of teacher/principal shortages. Retaining staff members was a high priority and superintendents did so through higher salaries, retention bonuses, and professional development incentives.

Growth of not only the superintendents in this study but professional growth for principals and teachers was found to be a priority. Superintendents ideally would be developing their own leadership capacity, but after becoming superintendents, developing leadership capacity in teachers/principals was more important. Leadership styles in general were discussed as they were more-relaxed with a global perspective of their district, allowing principals to do their job, and meeting the needs of their district.

Developing goals through strategic planning with district stakeholders was important in goals and resource allocation for rural superintendents. After becoming superintendent consensus building with staff and community, creation of the strategic plan, development of the action plan for the strategic plan, and revisiting and revising the strategic plan showed improved importance.

Rural superintendents felt they had a key role in the vision and goal planning of the district along with stakeholders either led by outside agencies or themselves.

Building mutual trust and utilizing communication between the superintendent and board of education were the ideal perceptions of superintendents prior to taking their positions. After they had gained experience they felt the same, but time spent on interpersonal communication with the board of education was highly important as well as time spent building relationships with the boards. Commitment to a board retreat scored the lowest in this area but some superintendents felt it was an important part of building mutual trust and relationships with the board of education.

Developing trust by being visible at school initiated events and in the community in general were the major themes in understanding the community for the rural superintendent. Participation in school initiated events, community groups, and remaining visible in the community were important both prior to and after becoming superintendents. Being visible, living in the school district, participating in local clubs and activities foster a sense of investment in the community. Rural superintendents generally loved their jobs, were in their ideal position and had earned the trust of their community.

Summary

As noted in the opening line in the introduction of this study, the rural K-12 school district superintendency is one of the most rewarding and yet challenging positions of school administration. There are many benefits for a rural superintendent. As superintendent you are known by most everyone in the district and you know them as well. Rural superintendents wear many hats and are involved in, have direct control of, and gain experience in responsibilities

such as: textbook adoption, curriculum development, purchasing of buses and maintenance equipment, technological systems, and HVAC systems. Many times rural superintendents still teach and coach students or serve as principals in smaller rural schools. Many times they are the sole decision-maker in the district. The board of education/superintendent relationship is the most critical relationship in the district. They must get along and articulate the same vision for the district.

There are also many challenges for the rural superintendent. The politics of the district could hamper efforts of the district, especially if they are ultra conservative toward funding for schools or if you must close a school. Because the superintendent must wear many hats, they may become stretched too thin. The rural superintendent is always the superintendent, 24 hours per day, whether they are at church, at the grocery store, Friday night ball games, or in the office. People and patrons will always feel they can approach the rural superintendent with school district issues.

Rural superintendents of this study believe that they are in their ideal positions and they love their job and communities that they live in. They show a passion for their position because they are enjoying their work and community. For those up to the challenge of living and working in a rural community, the evidence suggests that the benefits far outweigh the costs.

Limitations

This study was designed to only include superintendents from rural Kansas school districts. With this limitation, the study's findings are not generalizable to all rural school districts, superintendents, or rural communities.

Second, only interview respondent's answers to how they answered the survey and interview questions were utilized to determine changes in priorities of superintendent. These six interview respondent answers cannot be understood as representative of a larger survey sample, but rather just these six interview respondents' opinions.

Third, the researcher interviewed superintendents who may not be representative of different categories of superintendents in rural Kansas. Other categories of rural superintendents to be interviewed could be: female superintendents; only superintendents with less than five years of experience; only superintendents in rural remote Kansas school districts (NCES, 2006), or, superintendents from other rural states. The superintendents in this study represented six rural school districts in Kansas. By utilizing other demographics or categories of superintendents other results may have been obtained.

Fourth, other major areas that superintendents operate in could have been considered. Murphy et al. (1986) as discussed in chapter two identified nine control areas consisting of: selection; socialization; supervision; evaluation; rewards/sanctions; goals; resource allocation; behavior; and, technological specifications. Kowalski (2006) described the roles and responsibilities of the superintendent as: superintendent/school board relationships; leadership; resource management; human resource management; and community leadership. After synthesizing the aforementioned control areas and roles and responsibilities this study concentrated on five major areas a superintendent would operate in: selection, socialization, and monitoring; supervision and evaluation, goals and resource allocation; board of education/superintendent relationship; and understanding the community.

Lastly, superintendent's in answering the survey and interview responses were asked to look back in time and reflect on what they believed to be essential prior to becoming a

superintendent. In effect, since it was not captured in real time, it is a form of reflective or retrospective meaning making of what their perceptions were.

Future Research

This study contributes to the minimal body of literature regarding the rural superintendency. Therefore, there are many ways in which to further study rural superintendents that could contribute to the body of research.

First, it became apparent after observing Tables 1 through 3 that studying specific demographics of rural superintendents could be helpful. Areas to study would be superintendents that have been in their first position less than five years. Superintendents in varying size school districts could also be studied, perhaps only those defined as rural-distant as defined by the National Center for Education Statistics (2006). This study could also be utilized for rural superintendents in other states.

Second, with more female rural superintendents entering the field, a study could be done of superintendents based upon gender. Future studies could study female rural superintendents within the first five years of their service.

Third, the study could be replicated to determine the reliability and validity of the findings of this study of rural superintendents in Kansas.

Fourth, a longitudinal study could be done with this study by first surveying graduates of educational leadership programs in Kansas to answer the ideal perceptions of priorities of their responsibilities for rural superintendents and then after they are in a superintendent's position for a few years they could be surveyed to determine realistic or actual perceptions that they are experiencing. While the studies of perceptions of rural superintendents have been sparse in the

literature, research in what to expect in the rural superintendency would be beneficial for new superintendents in their first positions.

Appendix A

Superintendent Survey

Q1 Please indicate your USD number.

Q2 Please indicate the number of years in current position.

Q3 Please indicate the number of years of superintendent experience.

Q4 Please consider the following questions (Q4-Q8) in terms of your expectations or perceptions of the level of importance of each statement prior to becoming a superintendent on the left and after becoming a superintendent on the right. If utilizing your smartphone to take the survey, please click on the down arrow for each statement and answer the level of importance prior to (top three) becoming a superintendent and after (bottom three) becoming a superintendent.

Q4 Selection, Socialization and Monitoring. As a superintendent one key duty is the recruitment, hiring, and retention of staff. Please indicate the level of importance that you anticipated in each of the following areas **prior** to and **after** becoming a superintendent.

	Prior			After		
	Not Important (1)	Important (2)	Essential (3)	Not Important (4)	Important (5)	Essential (6)
Time spent on recruitment of teachers/principals? (1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Time spent on developing procedures to hire high quality teachers/principals? (2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Identification of the characteristics of the individuals to be considered for a position as teachers/principals? (3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interviewing prospective candidates for positions as teachers? (4)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interviewing prospective candidates for positions as principals? (5)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Development of activities to acclimate and retain staff members? (6)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q5 Supervision and Evaluation. As the district superintendent you must collaborate, supervise, and evaluate staff and programs in the district. Please describe the level of importance that you placed on each of the following areas **prior** to and **after** becoming a superintendent.

	Prior			After		
	Not Important (1)	Important (2)	Essential (3)	Not Important (4)	Important (5)	Essential (6)
Vision building with collaboration? (1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Planning and utilizing consensus? (2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing leadership capacity in principals and teachers? (3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing your own leadership capacity? (4)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Empowering principals/teachers to be innovative and risk taking? (5)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Time spent as an instructional leader? (6)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Time spent as a manager? (7)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q6 Board of Education/Superintendent Relationship. As a superintendent one of the key relationships in the district is between the board of education and superintendent. Please indicate how you perceived the level of importance prior to and after becoming a superintendent in each of the following areas.

	Prior				After	
How much time is spent building the board/superintendent relationship? (1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Time spent on working on interpersonal communication with the board of education? (2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Building mutual trust? (3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fostering a commitment to continuous improvement of the district? (4)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commitment to an annual board/superintendent retreat? (5)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q7 Goals and Resource Allocation. Developing district goals and allocating resources is an important function of a superintendent. Please indicate how you perceived your level of importance **prior** to and **after** becoming a superintendent in each of the following areas.

	Prior			After		
	Not Important (1)	Important (2)	Essential (3)	Not Important (4)	Important (5)	Essential (6)
Consensus building with staff and community? (1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Creation of a strategic plan? (2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Development of an action plan to follow the strategic plan? (3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Revisiting and revising the strategic plan? (4)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q8 Understanding the Community. Understanding the community that a superintendent will serve is important. What level of importance did you place on each of the following areas **prior** to and **after** becoming a superintendent?

	Prior			After		
	Not Important (1)	Important (2)	Essential (3)	Not Important (4)	Important (5)	Essential (6)
Informing the community through the district newsletter? (1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Informing the community through social media? (2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participation in school initiated events (i.e. activities, athletic events)? (3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participation in community groups? (4)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Visibility in the community? (5)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix B

Interview Guide

Interview participants: Rural Superintendents (n=6)

Introduction

- 1) Brief Description and goals of the study
- 2) HSCL paperwork
- 3) Purpose of interview data collection and why and how it will be used (for dissertation purposes)

Background information

- 1) Verification of demographics of school district
- 2) Background of superintendent (Could you provide a resume or curriculum vitae?)

Supervision and Evaluation

- 1) How would you describe your leadership style in regards to supervision and evaluation?
- 2) Has being a superintendent changed your leadership style?
- 3) If yes, what about the role of the superintendent has changed your leadership style?

Board of Education/Superintendent Relations

- 1) Ideally, what do you feel you and your board of education should be doing to build relations?
- 2) Currently what is your relationship with your board of education?
- 3) What are the aspects or issues that are keeping you from reaching the ideal?

Selection, Socialization, and Monitoring

- 1) What is your involvement in teacher recruitment, induction, and retention in your school district?
- 2) If a superintendent is to be involved in teacher recruitment and socialization, what do you perceive should be their role?
- 3) Are you currently practicing what you perceive as the ideal role of the superintendent and if not, why?

Goal and Resource Allocation

- 1) What do you feel is the superintendent's role in developing the vision and goals of the district?
- 2) How do you go about developing the vision and goals in your district?

Understanding the community

- 1) Should superintendents be involved in the local community? Why or why not?
- 2) Describe your involvement in the local community.
- 3) Why is it different?

Appendix C

Introduction email to survey participants

Dear (insert name),

My name is Rex Bollinger and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Kansas studying Educational Administration in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies department. For my dissertation I plan to explore superintendents' perceptions for those who have the dual responsibility of principal and superintendent related to their ideal and actual views of their roles as superintendents in a rural school district. My background is also in a rural school district with a dual role as principal as well but I believe your insights and perceptions will enhance the research for my dissertation.

I am sending an electronic link to a brief survey to collect data from 146 superintendents that work in rural school districts. Questions will be based upon leadership and management; board/administration relationships; teacher recruitment and socialization; vision building; and community involvement. The first question will require the USD number of your district which will be used to compile demographic data only.

If you choose not to participate in the survey, please respond to this email at rex.bollinger@ku.edu and your name will be removed from the distribution list, or you may simply delete the subsequent email.

I appreciate your time and thank you in advance for offering your time for furthering my dissertation research. If you have any concerns or questions, please contact me at rex.bollinger@ku.edu. You may also contact my dissertation chair Dr. Thomas DeLuca at tadeluca@ku.edu, or the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) at the University of Kansas, irb@ku.edu.

Attached to this email is additional Human Subjects information from the University of Kansas Internal Review Board Department.

Link to survey:

Thanks you again for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Rex E. Bollinger
Doctoral Candidate
University of Kansas

Appendix D

Email request for follow-up interviews of superintendents

Dear (insert name),

My name is Rex Bollinger and I am a doctoral student at the University of Kansas studying Educational Administration in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies under the guidance of. For my dissertation I wish to explore perceptions of superintendents that have the dual responsibility as principals on what their idealistic and realistic views of their roles as superintendents in rural schools. My background is also in a rural school district with a dual role as principal as well but I believe your insights and perceptions will enhance my research for my dissertation.

Recently you participated in a survey on the topic that I am studying. Currently, I am scheduling 6 follow-up interviews with superintendents for the purpose of exploring my topic in a deeper context. Would you be willing to participate in an interview lasting approximately 20-30 minutes? We can schedule these interviews in person, via Skype, or over the phone at a date and time of your convenience.

If you choose not to participate in the interview, please respond to this email at rex.bollinger@ku.edu.

I appreciate your time and thank you in advance for offering your time for furthering my dissertation research. If you have any concerns or questions, please contact me at rex.bollinger@ku.edu. You may also contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Thomas DeLuca at tadeluca@ku.edu, or the Human Subjects Committee at the University of Kansas, irb@ku.edu.

Attached to this email is additional Human Subjects information from the University of Kansas Internal Review Board Department.

Thanks you again for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Rex E. Bollinger
Doctoral Student
University of Kansas

Appendix E

HRPP for Survey Participants

The Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

We are conducting the study to explore perceptions of superintendents that have the dual responsibility as principals on what their idealistic and realistic views of their roles as superintendents in rural school districts in Kansas. Your participation is expected to take approximately 20 minutes to complete. The content of the survey should cause no more discomfort than you would experience in your everyday life.

Although participation may not benefit you directly, we believe that the information obtained from this study will lead to a better understanding of the perceptions of superintendents in rural school districts in Kansas. Your name will not be associated in any way with the research findings. Your identifiable information will not be shared unless a) it is required by law or university policy, and b) you give written permission. All information obtained in the survey is confidential, and the identity of all participants will remain anonymous. It is possible, however, with internet communications, that through intent or accident someone other than the intended recipient may see your response.

If you wish additional information about this study before or after it is completed, please feel free to contact us by phone or mail.

Completion of the survey indicates your willingness to take part in this study and that you are at least 18 years old. If you have any additional questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call (785) 864-7429 or write the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7563, email irb@ku.edu.

Sincerely,

Rex E. Bollinger
Student Researcher
Department of Educational Leadership
and Policy Studies
University of Kansas
Lawrence, KS 66045
rex.bollinger@ku.edu

Dr. Thomas DeLuca
Faculty Supervisor
Department of Educational Leadership
and Policy Studies
University of Kansas
Lawrence, KS 66045
tadeluca@ku.edu

Appendix F

Interview Participant Informed Consent Letter

Dear Educator,

You have been identified as a current school district superintendent or a rural school district in Kansas. We are especially interested in your perceptions as a superintendent on what your idealistic and realistic views of your role as superintendents in rural school.

Would you be willing to share your insights with me in an interview lasting approximately 20-30 minutes? This interview would be for the University of Kansas research purposes only. Participation is entirely voluntary, and you can withdraw from the study at any time without negatively affecting relationships with your school or the University of Kansas. Involvement in the study should pose no risks- we just want to hear your thoughts, experiences and perceptions. We believe that the benefit of this research will inform practice of current and future superintendents of rural school districts in Kansas. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed by myself for later analysis. This recording can be stopped at any time during the interview. I will store the data collected during the study in my secure, password protected computer for up to 18 months for use in my dissertation, after which the audio and related files will be destroyed. Responses shared during the interview will be treated in a confidential manner. Your identifiable information will not be shared unless a) it is required by law or university policy, and b) you give written permission.

Thank you in advance for your willingness to participate in this study. I plan to share my findings in my dissertation as partial requirement for a doctoral degree in Education Administration. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Rex Bollinger at (785)741-3578 or rex.bollinger@ku.edu, or my faculty supervisor Dr. Thomas DeLuca at (785) 864-9844 or tadeluca@ku.edu.

Sincerely,

Rex E. Bollinger

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding this study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385, write the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7568, or email irb@ku.edu.

I agree to take part in this study as a research participant. By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and that I have received a copy of the Consent and Authorization form.

Print Participant's Name

Date

Signature of Participant

Date

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